CHAPTER 5

The Accomodating Behavior of Ecuadorian English Teachers

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Introduction

Teacher classroom practices are evaluated on a regular basis to ensure account-ability throughout the educational system. Students, of course, must receive the best teaching possible, while school administrators must make certain that these practices are in place in individual classrooms as well as provide higher administration with aggregate institutional assessment data for systematic use. This assessment comes full circle when teachers are provided with this data to improve their practice (Acar, Akgün Özpolat, and Çomoğlu, 2023).

Observation has become a standard means of evaluating teachers and an essential component of educational systems worldwide. It is, after all, among the few direct means through which authorities can measure ongoing activities in the classroom. But observation is also a complicated issue that can influence typical class activities and observation of them. To be reliable, observation procedures typically follow relatively standard protocols. At the same time, observation must also capture the more subjective, context-based elements that shape individual teaching dynamics within the classroom. As a result, participants may not trust the results or want to participate.

Accordingly, this chapter considers survey data involving Ecuadorian EFL teachers' responses to in-service observations of their classroom practices. Such an analysis investigates the links between the approaches teachers prioritize during classroom observations and those mandated by the MINEDUC. This inquiry leads to insights about how observation is related to and affects power relations, and also how the observation procedure influences the teachers' views of their own practices and the curricular and instructional paradigms in which they work. Such insights provide yet another way to address the clear disjuncture between teaching practices and curricular outcomes examined in earlier chapters. By better understanding these concerns, this chapter also illuminates opportunities for change in the observation procedure as a practice that promotes teacher accountability and as a potential data collection tool, which assures institutional quality.

To those ends, the survey asked teachers to describe the approaches they used when observed by supervisors, their responses to the follow-up feedback, and their perceptions of their classroom practices vis-á-vis the recommended national methodologies and other curricular concerns. Significantly, the results reveal that

the relationship between teacher practices and the mandated curriculum is less important to teachers than the relationship between their classroom practices and institutional requirements. Furthermore, the analysis shows that teachers who believe that the students are reaching nationally mandated curricular goals also feel greater degrees of comfort and confidence when being observed, even as overwhelming data suggests that students largely do not achieve such outcomes. As such, this chapter discloses the limitations of current observation practices as a tool for teacher evaluation and quality assurance, while also pointing toward opportunities to revise such practices for better outcomes.

Navigating Issues of Compliance and Teacher Agency

Globally, the 1960s ushered in widespread concerns with systematic institutional accountability. For education, these concerns were manifested in efforts to monitor and improve teaching methodology and practice within a centralized, standardized structure. The result was the traditional objective-based approach to provide best teaching practices for pre-service and active teachers (Cockburn, 2005; Lasagabaster and Sierra, 20). Observation emerged as a tool to teach, measure, and monitor these practices. In the name of accountability, the early forms of observation were simple, unsophisticated, and often randomly constructed as well as applied (Ozdemir, 2011, pp.1594-1596). With the development of communicative methodologies in language education, observation procedures shifted in kind and attempted to capture the more subtle individual, subjective elements of teacher practices with systematicity as well as flexibility.[1] This approach, as discussed below, is this chapter's focus.

The observation process can vary in different geographical and disciplinary contexts, EFL among them (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011). But, overall, the process is similar in its design to teach, monitor, and evaluate teacher performance throughout and across a teacher's career. The key to the process is the observation dialogue between observer and observed, a dialogue which should promote collaboration, reflection, and enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills. To ensure that observation is successful and beneficial, observers must know what to look for, how to provide effective feedback, and how to remain non-judgmental (Gebhard,

1984). Using a standardized checklist, for example, presumably mitigates biased results and represents assessment data (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011).

Observation practices are also built into the teacher training and professional development process as appropriate to different stages of the teacher's career. Most commonly, observation is carried out in three consecutive forms (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011; Merç, 2015; Sha and Al Harthi, 2014). Mentors first observe student-teachers as part of the learning process during their initial training and teacher preparation. Later, in-service teachers are observed in turn by supervisors. Within the ongoing learning process, professional development includes observation-based peer review, which helps colleagues share knowledge and practices (Merç, 2015). The types of observation share a relatively standard protocol but also vary in purpose and perspective; as mentors use observations to guide and train teachers for their initial preparation, while supervisors and institutions may use observations by supervisors as critical data in evaluating instructors, and in turn making personnel decisions (hiring, firing, promotion), informing program design, and assuring quality of instruction.

Properly conducted, observation can be a useful tool. However, when the procedure neglects or defies any of the central precepts named above it is less than useful. In those cases, feedback may be anywhere from non-existent to unhelpful or even harmful to students, instructors, and institutions. Supervisors may not be trained or prepared to observe and might take a random and/or one-and-done approach. All too frequently, then, observation is carried out on a top-down, observer-dominated model that is unreliable, intimidating, and counter-productive. Accordingly, many teachers resent the intrusion on their classroom, feeling a loss of autonomy and negativity toward the observation process more generally (Cockburn 2005; Merç, 2015; Sha and Al Harthi, 2014).

Current research agrees that top-down approaches to teacher observation must be overturned as part of systematic reform by embracing the communicative approaches on which the current curriculum is based. In such an environment, observation is initiated and carried out by teachers with collegial collaboration in their institutions and seeks equity for all (Lasagabaster and Sierra, 2011). The key to this restructuring is still the relationship between observer and observed (Sha and Al Harthi, 2015; Özdemir, 2020). Administrators must earn teacher confidence through knowledge and professionalism, and teachers must gain helpful feedback

(Dos Santos, 2017). Trust, transparency, and opportunities for shared knowledge-building among teachers and supervisors are therefore essential features of effective observation practices.

With this theoretical framework in mind, this chapter deploys a quantitative, analytic methodology to EFL teacher responses regarding their experiences in the observation process. Here, the questions tested the relationships between teacher observation and classroom practices. This goal was actualized in three research questions. The first question queries how in-service EFL teachers prioritize their behaviors while being observed (survey question #19). The responses were collected on a scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 represents aspects of their teaching that are least prioritized and 5 represents the most prioritized aspects of their teaching when being observed by their supervisors. This question considered perfunctory elements of classroom teaching, such as completing planned activities and ability to use classroom technology, the application of different teaching strategies, and complying with rules, regulations, and curricular expectations. In this way, these survey responses provide insights into a constellation of issues related to teachers' beliefs about what they should be seen doing in the classroom as well as behaviors that they believe will be viewed favorably by their supervisors.

The second question queries EFL teachers' affective responses upon receiving feedback from their supervisors based on classroom observations. Teachers were given options of "grateful," "indifferent," or "frustrated" to specify their responses to the feedback process. The third question elicits information about EFL teachers' affective responses while being observed; the goal of this question was understanding how the presence of supervisors in the classroom influences the power dynamics between teachers and authorities. Teachers selected between five options (confident, relaxed, nervous, uncomfortable, and impatient) designed to capture common affective responses to in situ observations. Such responses reveal indirectly how teachers perceive authority in relation to their classroom practices.

As with previous chapters, frequencies to the three individual questions covered in this chapter were first tabulated and ranked. The ensuing correlational analysis attempts to establish the presence or absence of relationships with demographic indicators, as well as beliefs about teaching practices and the national curricular guidelines that were discussed earlier. Similar to those results, demographics reveal little influence on teachers' behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs, suggesting that

our results are generalizable to the overall EFL teaching population in Ecuador. Whereas other chapters revealed English certification as a consistent predictor of these tendencies, it serves as a less reliable indicator here when it comes to how teachers feel and perform when confronted with institutional authorities in the classroom observation process. Instead, the analysis turns attention to other indicators, such as teachers' understanding of their own methodologies and beliefs about student achievement as well as how such understanding is reflected (or not) in what they reveal to their supervisors when being observed. Ultimately, this analysis reveals possibilities for intervention designed to improve observation as a tool for bettering both teacher practice and learning outcomes.

Accommodation and Affect in EFL Teacher Observations

Taken together, the survey questions related to EFL teacher observations point toward a context in which teachers demonstrate compliance and appear accommodating to institutional hierarchies. Such assertions are based on evidence from the survey that indicate that teachers prioritize easily observable behaviors in their teaching to gain supervisor approval (see Figure 1). For example, the rankings for question 19 indicate that teachers report the completion of prepared activities as their highest priority (m = 4.40), followed by promoting a good relationship with students (m = 4.38), and student discipline (m = 4.29). These priorities share the fact that they are immediately visible to the observer and can easily be verified. Compliance with institutional rules also rank highly (m = 4.25) and likewise are relatively easy to measure according to established guidelines familiar to both teacher and supervisor.

Teaching elements that are more difficult to quantify or that require more abstract knowledge of effective teaching practices fall in the middle of the rankings; these include use of general English teaching strategies (m = 4.23), the type of feedback provided to students (m = 4.17), and the use of English in the classroom (m = 4.03) and of group work (m = 3.97). Perhaps more importantly, though, the nationally mandated teaching methodologies fall within the bottom third of ranked items (m = 3.93), along with the time that teachers speak in the class (m = 3.48). Such comparatively low rankings indicate that teachers do not consciously rely on the national curriculum guidelines in their practice, even when observed by a

supervisor who presumably should also measure teaching competence according to that framework. In addition, the limited emphasis on teacher speaking time affirms assertions made in previous chapters about misalignments between teachers' beliefs about their own practices as communicative and the comparatively mixed bag of teaching methods they use.

Figure 1. Ranking of Teachers' Priorities When Being Observed

	N		Mean
	Valid	Missing	
Completing prepared activities	2980	833	4.40
Promoting a good relationship with students	2972	841	4.38
Student discipline	2983	830	4.29
Compliance with institutional rules	2971	842	4.25
Use of general English teaching strategies	2977	836	4.23
Type of feedback given to students	2978	835	4.17
Use of English in the classroom both by the teacher and students	2979	834	4.03
Group work	2978	835	3.97
Use of English teaching methodologies established in the national curriculum	2982	831	3.93
Use of technological resources and equipment	2967	846	3.60
The amount of time the teacher speaks	2966	847	3.48

As with most other variables tested in previous chapters, correlational analysis reveals few relationships between teacher beliefs and key demographic indicators, suggesting these results are generalizable across the sample of EFL teachers. Once again, the strongest predictions among demographic indicators can be made based on English certification, which corresponds to somewhat greater attention to managing student discipline (Somers' D = .070), the amount of time the teacher speaks (.094), the use of English in the classroom (.087), the kinds of feedback provided to students (.062), and their use of general English teaching strategies (.098). Years of teaching experience present fewer indicators of increased teacher awareness to

these concerns during teacher observations; they show relationships only with the management of student discipline (.029), group activities (.055), and attention to national curriculum guidelines (.045). Relationships between educational attainment and self-reported English proficiency with teacher priorities while being observed were not revealed in the analysis; this finding is consistent with the influence of these demographic indicators on other variables related to teacher practice that were examined in earlier chapters.

These results suggest that EFL teachers overall prioritize highly visible elements of their practice that are comparatively easy to quantify, but they do not provide insights about why. Additional answers may lie in teachers' response to questions 20 and 21 about how they feel toward their supervisor's feedback, and their own affective response to being observed (see Figure 2). On the first question, most teachers (92.8%) expressed gratitude, while only 7.2% felt frustrated or indifferent (n = 2987). On the second question, most EFL teachers report feeling relaxed or confident while being observed (63%), with comparatively few expressing feelings of discomfort, nervousness, or impatience (37%), as illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 2. Teachers' Feelings While Being Observed

			Frequency	Percent
N	**Valid**	**Relaxed**	876	23.0%
		Confident	1524	40.0%
		Uncomfortable	165	4.3%
		Nervous	62	1.6%
		Impatient	360	9.4%
		Total	2987	78.3%
	Missing		826	21.7%

From this data, it seems likely that teachers avoid the discomfort inherent in the observation process and seek gratification from their supervisors by showing them what is most easy to see and measure; the result is disproportionate emphasis on compliance rather than effectiveness. The results therefore indicate teacher deference to institutional authority, deference that could be reflected in their prioritization of easily measurable features of their teaching, resulting in a mutually reinforcing cycle of accommodation to institutional expectations. Put

another way, most EFL teachers appear to take few risks when being observed. Such avoidance may inhibit their willingness to deploy more varied methodologies that would more closely align with national curricular guidelines or to create space for meaningful communicative activities in their classroom. Such features are symptomatic of issues and are related to power and authority under a top-down evaluation paradigm, and with these come the attending problems of reliability in the teacher observation process.

Teaching Observations, Institutional Hierarchies, and Learning Outcomes

Not surprisingly, cross-tabulation analysis reveals few, if any, significant relationships with their formal professional training or English proficiency, in keeping with most of the findings of previous chapters. English proficiency certification is less relevant here as a predictor than in other parts of this study ($p = .002$, $x^2 = .076$), and only the years of teaching experience corresponds with greater feelings of relaxation and confidence ($p = <.001$, $x2 = .103$) while being observed. Overall, then, formal training or incidental demographic indicators provide little insight into how teachers respond to observations as a mechanism for teacher evaluation and quality assurance.

However, relationships between teachers' priorities during supervisor observations are better predicted by teachers' beliefs about their own teaching methodologies, which have been explored in greater depth in Chapter 3. Specifically, those who believe their teaching methods are varied and communicative are consistently more likely to place greater emphasis on all the variables related to their priorities while being observed, as illustrated in Figure 3. Here, tests of statistical significance and intensity reveal consistent relationships between these variables. Teachers who believe their methods are communicative are more likely to report that they prioritize their use of English teaching strategies, feedback to students, use of English in the classroom, and application of nationally mandated teaching methods when being observed; each of these priorities can be associated with more communicative approaches to EFL teaching. When ranked, perfunctory teaching issues become less important, although overall they reveal heightened concern for all variables among those who consider their methods to be communicative.

Figure 3. Priorities While Being Observed as Factor of Beliefs About Use of Communicative Methodologies

	Chi-square	p	Somers' D
Use of general English teaching strategies	479.766	<.001	.286
Type of feedback given to students	356.385	<.001	.261
Use of English in the classroom both by the teacher and students	304.478	<.001	.231
Use of English teaching methodologies established in the national curriculum	302.194	<.001	.226
Completing prepared activities	216.353	<.001	.190
Use of technological resources and equipment	203.003	<.001	.184
Compliance with institutional rules	165.504	<.001	.178
Promoting a good relationship with students	199.686	<.001	.173
Group work	192.816	<.001	.167
Student discipline	164.801	<.001	.131
The amount of time the teacher speaks	79.859	<.001	.060

These results indicate that teachers' beliefs about their own practices, whether they reflect the realities of their classrooms or not, may increase their awareness of both overt institutional requirements and indirect measures of their teaching effectiveness under observation conditions. Teachers who believe they use communicative teaching strategies demonstrate more attention to practices that allow for greater communicative teaching contexts. In contrast to the findings of Chapter 3, which showed clear discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and overt communicative practices, the findings here suggest some opportunity for intervention among teachers who demonstrate greater awareness of general classroom conditions; such interventions are prerequisites for the application of more specific EFL communicative teaching methods and include limiting teacher speaking time and providing greater exposure to and use of English in the classroom context.

 The analysis also points to important relationships between teachers' views on the national curriculum, student achievement, and their experiences during teacher observations. Teachers who report greater levels of comfort and confidence during

observations are somewhat more likely to agree that the objectives of the national curriculum are achievable (.275). They are also more likely to agree that students achieve the English proficiency levels expected by the national curriculum, both for their own students (.255) and in general (.216). Responses in which teachers perceive that the curriculum is culturally relevant to their students and that the curriculum is flexible also correlate to greater feelings of comfort and confidence during the observation process (.225 and .185, respectively). The confidence and comfort when being observed, then, perhaps indicate as much about teachers' sense of accomplishment and autonomy in general as it does about the dynamics of teacher performance under supervisory observation.

Surprisingly, however, teachers' experiences during observations seem relatively unaffected by their workload, this despite the findings presented in Chapter 2 that indicate workload is an important factor in teacher performance and student achievement. Neither the number of students per class nor the overall teaching load calculated by the total number of students or sections appear to have any significant relationship with teachers' affective responses while being observed. The only factor related to classroom conditions or workload that appears to influence teachers' attitudes during observations is access to adequate resources, which correlates to greater confidence and relaxation in the observation process (.222). Overall, if teachers are feeling stressed or overwhelmed at work, they do not let it show to their supervisors. Instead, they broadly accommodate their observers, projecting confidence through emphasizing perfunctory teaching practices, which cycles back to them as positive feedback from authorities.

Based on these results, the analysis identifies and investigates inconsistencies between the teacher responses to questions involving observation and questions involving the curriculum covered in other chapters of this book. Specifically, the data exposes disconnects in teachers' responses between how they feel when observed teaching and what they teach, both when observed and in their daily classroom. Again, the responses suggest that teachers are receiving mixed messages and are accommodating authorities in various ways. These inconsistencies suggest that institutional expectations and national expectations are not well aligned. Theoretically, they should both be prioritized around the same level. Again, there is reason to be concerned about teacher knowledge of the methodologies and their use in the classroom. Taken together, these results suggest that the observed teachers want to please their local administrators.

This kind of accommodation indicates that the observation procedure rests on a problematic and confusing top-down model. As indicated, when teachers are observed, they say that they prioritize the institutional rules; this suggests that immediate school authorities are more present in teachers' minds at the time they are observed than national authorities. Yet, in responses to questions about what methods they used, teacher responses indicate that they use the mandated curriculum, even though the data suggests they do not. Instead of exposing and resolving these issues through dialogue among teachers and supervisors, observations of Ecuadorian EFL teachers appear more adept at creating a culture of complacency.

These concerns involving observation lead to others about the observation procedure, especially as instantiated here for teaching EFL. As indicated, the observation depends on a generic checklist of 25 items; one, in fact, used to evaluate all observations in all subjects in this case. Such a generic sheet is problematic in several ways. First, checklists are designed to assess groups for placement purposes but not to evaluate what individual people know. Given that such checklists should only collect quantitative data, they should not be the sole means of observing teachers to rate individual performance. This checklist, or this checklist alone, is therefore not appropriate to evaluate individual Ecuadorian EFL teachers in action.

Of note, the MINEDUC's observation tool does not include aspects of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach on which the EFL curriculum depends; for example, teachers' use of authentic language, teaching English through English, using small student work groups to include interactive communicative practice, creating activities that allow students to express their ideas and opinions, and establishing real-world and context-based situations to promote communication and monitoring. The observation procedure must be revised to include these EFL criteria as well as capture subjective elements that can then be used for feedback. To those ends, the process could include teacher surveys with open-ended questions and/or focus groups. Although these efforts are considered time-consuming and expensive, they are quite effective and efficient and, in the long run, address the actual problems and needs the Ecuadorian EFL curriculum has. Acquiring subjective elements would help ascertain what teachers know about the methodologies available and how they apply them. Moreover, a new method of class observation should take advantage of teachers' openness to observation.

The top-down observation is faulty in many respects and must be replaced. It does not, in fact, achieve its goals of providing continuous professional development through collaboration, mentoring, and appropriate and consistent feedback (Cockburn, 2005b; Sha and Al Harthi, 2014). This shift must encourage trust between observer and observed. To that end, supervisors must have content and pedagogy knowledge and be trained to observe (Özdemir, 2020). Observation must be a process that starts with pre-service learning and continues throughout the lifespan of all teachers.

The observation procedure must be reformed to use ground-up approaches, both in dealing with this chapter's topic as well as those discussed in other chapters. More research is needed as well as more surveys based on the research to respond to the following questions: What are the institutional guidelines? They are unknown and likely vary. What were the results of the checklists? Are teachers trying to please instead of being candid in the surveys? Do teachers know about communicative and objective-based methodologies and practices? Do supervisors understand the process and apply it continuously and systematically, while explaining it to teachers and giving them feedback? The goal is a teacher-centered form of observation and evaluation as part of an overall student-centered curriculum integrated throughout the Ecuadorian systematic curriculum and reforms.

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