

# Lesson Observation as a Tool for Professional Development for Teachers in Public Day Secondary Schools in Kisii Central Sub-County, Kisii County, Kenya

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## Abstract

The objective of this study was to examine the utilization of lesson observation in promoting professional development for teachers in public day secondary schools in Kisii Central Sub-County, Kisii County, Kenya. A descriptive survey was conducted among 12 principals and 72 teachers drawn from 12 public day secondary schools in Kisii central sub-county through proportionate random sampling. Data were collected using teachers' questionnaire and principals interview. The study found out that lesson observation was not aligned to teacher professional development and was only carried out to fulfil Teacher Service Commission requirement. Additionally, lesson observations were not conducted frequently as they were impeded by teachers who were not receptive to feedback while other teachers failed to prepare and present themselves for observation. Provision of feedback to teachers after lesson observation was inadequate as it was neither timely nor very useful to the majority of teachers who received feedback after observation. The study concluded that lesson observation is instrumental in teacher professional development, however, as it is conducted it may not yield much as it is marred by fear of the implications of lesson observer's reports which may influence the decisions of the teachers' employer regarding teachers' professional growth. The study recommends that teachers service commission should sensitize principals and teachers on the essence of lesson observation in promoting teachers' professional development. Teacher service commission should also appoint more Heads of Departments in order to promote efficacy in teacher professional development through lesson observation.

**Key words:** Lesson observation, Teacher professional development

## Introduction

Provision of quality education has been at the centre of education debate in many countries across the globe as they undertake reforms for national and economic development (UNESCO,2021). Quality education cannot take place without the teacher. To provide quality education, teacher evaluation that promotes professional development and instruction must be undertaken. Performance appraisal should not only evaluate teachers' performance but also give intentional and purposeful feedback to improve teaching. Performance appraisals encourage teacher learning which results to quality teaching (Wanjala & Osendo, 2019). In Kenya, Teacher Service Commission (TSC) rolled out an open performance appraisal system with a view of strengthening supervision and continuous monitoring of the performance of the teacher in maintaining teaching standards (TSC,2016).

The current teacher's performance appraisal and development (TPAD) replaced the traditional teacher appraisal previously conducted by the head teachers or TSC county directors which by far and large was subjective. TPAD departs from previously closed and autocratic process to a democratic, participatory and interactive one which is school based and in which the teacher is involved in planning for their own targeted lesson observation. Teacher performance appraisal and development was designed as an evaluation tool and a means of identifying performance gap. It aids in making crucial decisions regarding teacher deployment, promotions and professional development (TSC, 2015) TPAD manual requires lesson observation to be

carried out as part of appraisal alongside preparation of professional documents such as schemes of work, lesson plans among others.

Lesson observation is a key ingredient in supportive teacher professional development. By design lesson observation should provide an opportunity for the teacher to improve on their performance competencies. According to Bello and Olaer (2020) lesson observation is an appropriate method of enhancing instruction competencies as it stimulates progression in improved teaching if conducted carefully. It provides a more effective way of gathering data on teachers' performance and provides a direct input into performance (Laska,2016). These data can be used to make decision on teachers' professional development.

Lesson observation is critical in developing teacher competencies as it provides a face to face interaction between the teacher and the appraiser in which the two can use real data collected from instructional environment to analyze and improve teachers' classroom practices (Kemal, Yilmaz & Ahmed,2017). To the observer lesson observation provides an opportunity to analyze performance gaps and provide support for teachers' professional growth.

Lesson observation provides a platform for promoting teacher professional growth by inspiring them to conduct self-evaluation and reflection on their instructional practices (Guru and Abulad,2014) to match new development in the teaching profession. Open teachers' performance appraisal and development(TPAD) has been in use for six years now. The key question in this study is whether lesson observation as a component of teacher professional development and appraisal has had the intended purpose. In this paper teacher professional development refers to development of knowledge and skills in teacher's area of specialization through lesson observation.

### **Purpose of The study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the utilization of lesson observation in promoting professional development for teachers in public day secondary schools in Kisii Central Sub-County, Kisii County, Kenya.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the TPAD Manual 2016 the Teacher Service Commission observe that performance appraisals is expected to improve teacher performance competencies, analyze teacher performance gap and provide support for professional development. According to Owuor and Jonyo (2017) TPAD has had positive impact on teacher lesson attendance. However, they are not particular on lesson observation. TPAD focuses on teachers work from preparation of professional documents however the critical work takes place in the classroom. It is through lesson observation that the typical skill of teaching can be observed, appraised and developed. Teachers performance appraisal and development (TPAD) requires that a teacher request for lesson observation by filling an online request form monthly.

While a lot of literature points at what is expected to be done, none of the previous research addresses how lesson observation as a key component of teacher performance appraisal and development is being implemented and if it specifically plays the intended role of promoting teachers' professional development. Lesson observation is a mandatory requirement in the new TPAD 2 system by TSC. All teachers must undergo lesson observation while delivering in class. It involves carrying out a formal scrutiny of teaching/learning while it is taking place in a classroom or other learning environment.

### **Research Objective**

To examine the utilization of lesson observation for professional development for teachers in Kisii Central Sub-County, Kisii County, Kenya.

## Literature Review

Continuous teacher professional development is key in helping keep teachers abreast with fast paced development in education by reflecting on their practices and developing strategies for responding to emerging issues in education and in their classes (Siddiqua, 2019). Lesson observation is gaining popularity as a professional development tool as it provides real data on teacher's instructional practices, strengths and weaknesses which can be used to develop individualized needs based training in schools. It is an opportunity for the observer to ascertain the real situation of teacher's instructional practices, challenges and make recommendation on possible improvement (Laska,2016). It offers an alternative, relevant and cost effective method of promoting teachers professional growth which departs from the traditional one size fits all workshops and seminars designed by the Ministry of Education at the District level.

A study conducted in Hong Kong by Lee, Walker and Chui (2012) found out that teachers did not embrace lesson observation which they viewed as unnecessary pressure. Similarly, a study conducted in Tanzania by Manaseh (2016) showed that principals refrained from conducting lesson observation as it was perceived as lack of trust in the teacher. Lesson observation is meant to improve teachers' effectiveness by encouraging them to be more innovative. Lesson observation helps the teacher to reflect on their job performance by diagnosing and providing solutions to teaching problems through provision of timely feedback (Chen, 2018; Bencherab & Maskari,2020). However, lesson observation can only enhance teachers' growth if properly planned and if there exist trust between the teacher and the appraiser. For lesson observation to be meaningful in promoting teachers' professional development it must be characterized by trust, openness and non-judgmental interaction between the teacher and observer (Siddiqua,2019)

Elshehri (2018) observed that classroom observation played a significant role in teacher professional development as it motivated teachers to update their teaching regularly in a study carried out in Egyptian, Pakistani, and Saudi. The study indicates that feedback given to teachers after observation lacked specific suggestions to help teachers improve on their weaknesses in teaching and that observers tended to impose certain teaching methods on teachers. The findings of the study resonate with findings by Academic Development Institute (2017) in studies conducted in Chicago and Tennessee which showed that feedback given lacked in-depth and specific instructional insights to help teacher improve their practice. Feedback given to the teacher should be based on teacher's performance and should be aimed at helping the teacher to improve their teaching.

A study conducted in Philippines by Guru and Abulad (2014) found out that lesson observation is a crucial tool in teacher performance in the classroom. The study looked at lesson observation as a supportive aspect of supervision and not necessarily as a tool for professional development for the teacher. Teachers in the study were more inclined to formative purposes of lesson observation which promote teacher professional development while observers were interested in summative evaluation which emphasize improving quality.

Reviewed literature indicates why lesson observation is not carried out (Lee et al. 2012; Manaseh,2016) or the significance of lesson observation in teacher professional development (Guru and Abulad, 2014; Elshehri,2018). Previous studies focus on evaluation of teachers' performance without addressing how lesson observation promotes teacher professional growth. Studies carried out in Kenyan context indicate how teacher performance appraisal should be carried out without special emphasis on lesson observation (Owuor & Jonyo ,2017; Wanjala & Osendo, 2019). None of these studies indicates how lesson observation is carried out and whether it promotes teacher professional development which is the concern of the currents

study. The current study explores views from both the teacher and the principal who in most instances conduct lesson observation.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

The study was a cross sectional survey. A survey describes the characteristics of a population with respect to one or more variables (Frankeal, Ellen and Hyun, 2012).

### *Population*

The study targeted principals and teachers in 25 public day secondary schools in Kisii Central Sub- County, Kisii County, Kenya.

### *Sample*

Proportionate random sampling was used to select 12 out of the 25 schools in the Sub- County. Proportionate random sampling ensured that zones with more schools were given more chances than those with fewer schools (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). Using proportionate random sampling 72 teachers from the sampled schools were selected to participate in the study. Principals whose schools were chosen were automatically included in the sample. Thus 12 principals were selected into the sample purposively as they were believed to be in a position to supply relevant information on use of lesson observation for teacher professional development (Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

### *Research tools*

Data were collected using semi structured questionnaires for teachers and a brief interview guide for principals. Test-re-test method was used to test the reliability of the research tools in two schools not part of the study sample. Correlation between test and re-test results yielded a reliability index of 0.7. Thus instruments were revised and adopted for the study. The researcher consulted experts in education management to enhance content and construct validity of the instrument. Peer reviews also enhanced face and content validity. Content validity of the data was also enhanced through methodological and source triangulation (Frankeal et al., 2012).

### *Analysis*

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were obtained with the help of SPSS version 22 while qualitative data were summarized into topical issues, and presented as narrative reports to depict the information as obtained from the source. These data were then integrated with quantitative data for discussion.

## **Findings and Discussions**

The study sought to establish whether principals conduct lesson observation. More than half of the sampled teachers, 70.8%, indicated that their principals conducted lesson observation while 29.2% indicated that they did not. Teachers who indicated that principals do not observe lessons were distributed in all the sampled schools which does not suggest that lesson observation is not conducted in their schools but rather a shared responsibility.

The responses suggest that lesson observation is a shared responsibility between the principals, deputy

principals, heads of departments and other teachers. The Teachers Service Commission expects lesson observation to be hierarchical where teachers in Post primary institution are observed by the Heads of Departments who in turn are observed by the Deputy who is observed by the principal. The principal should be observed by the officers from the Sub-County Director of Education (TSC, 2016). However, this does not seem to be happening in all schools as there were only a few substantive heads of departments in the sampled schools at the time this study was conducted. As such, principals often found themselves conducting lesson observation and in some schools the deputy principals assist in carrying out the exercise.

Further, teachers were asked whether the task of lesson observation was a distributed task or not through the question *'Who else participates in lesson observation'*. Half of the teachers (50%) indicated that heads of departments observed lessons, 45.8 % indicated the deputy principal and 30.6% of the teachers indicated other teachers participated in lesson observation. Two principals confirmed that teachers were asked to observe colleagues in their areas of specialization especially where there was more than one teacher in an area of specialization. However, one of the principals expressed reservations in delegating lesson observation as it may not be conducted at all. The principal indicated *"Some heads of departments liaise with teachers to lie about lesson observation and simply fill in lesson observation forms from the staffroom."* The principal further observed: *"Lesson observation is seen as victimization. It causes rifts amongst teachers when the principal delegates lesson observation to other teachers"*

While lesson observation was reported to yield positive results in a study by Kemal et al. (2017) the current study reports reverse results as teachers assigned appraisal role for other teachers specialized in similar subjects as themselves ended up filling lesson observation forms from the staff room. Heads of departments not supporting the principal in lesson observation is indicative of the challenges facing implementation of TPAD. Although the principal is expected to be knowledgeable in curriculum delivery, Heads of Departments and other teachers may have specialised in the same area as the teacher being observed, as such they can prompt the teacher being observe to reflect and improve on their teaching by observing the teacher in class and analysing his or her performance skilfully in order to provide meaningful feedback. This may not be so with the principal or the deputy principal who may not have specialised in the same area as the teacher being observed.

Another principal explained that: *"Teachers fail to prepare for lesson observation and deliberately avoid the principal and deputy principal on the day they have been asked to prepare for observation"*. Lesson observation presents the appraiser with opportunity to find out if the teacher is knowledgeable in subject matter of their area of specialization as well as pedagogy. It also provides opportunity for teachers' professional growth if it is properly organised. For lesson observation to impact teachers' professional growth and promote learning the teachers and the appraiser should plan for lesson observation together with the aim of diagnosing teachers' pedagogical challenges and offering solutions. When conducted carefully, lesson observation enhances teachers' work performance (Laska,2016). Filling lesson observation forms without observing the teacher in class shows that the process is taken as a routine rather than an opportunity to develop teachers' professional skills.

The findings of this study agree with findings by Academic Development Institute (2017) that lesson observation is treated more of a compliance rather than an opportunity for the teacher to learn about their practice and develop their competencies. If conducted well lesson observation impacts teachers professional practice and professional growth (Department of Education,2018) as it enables teachers to enquire into their practice, share ideas and discuss challenges with the observer. Lesson observation is an effective method of obtaining information on teachers' pedagogical effectiveness and can be used to enhance the quality of teaching (Wanzare ,2012).

Teachers Service Commission (2015) in the code of regulations states that the appraisal report shall be used for promotion, deployment and other rewards as well as in identifying training needs and taking corrective

measures where teachers' performance is not satisfactory. This may influence teachers' attitude towards lesson observation as they may link it to punitive measures which may ensue after unfavourable appraisal. For lesson observation to be meaningful the appraiser should tailor it to enhance teachers' instructional capacity. If teachers perceive lesson observation to be driven by the need to promote their professional growth they are more likely to be receptive to lesson observation and feedback given after the exercise (Lee, et al. (2012).

### Frequency of Lesson Observation

Teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they are observed during lessons. Teachers' responses are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Frequency of Lesson Observation**

Lesson observation	Frequency	Percentage
No response	21	29.2
Monthly	21	29.2
Termly	22	30.6
Never	8	11.0
Total	72	100.0

Table 1 indicates that 29.2% of the teachers did not respond to the item. An equal portion of teachers (29.2%) indicated that they are observed once a month, 30.6% of the teachers indicated that they were observed termly, while 11.1% indicated that they are not observed. Out of the 51 teachers who responded to the item, majority of them indicated that they are observed once in a term. Interviews with principals confirmed the information that teachers were only observed once per term to meet TSC requirements. This indicates that lesson observation was conducted as required by the Teachers' Service Commission. However, this may give the appraiser skewed opinion of teacher's performance and may not provide information on the teacher's growth on suggested areas of improvement. Cyclical observations provide the teacher with opportunity to develop professional skills (Saddiqua, 2019) and the appraiser an opportunity to facilitate teacher's growth.

### Provision of Feedback after Lesson Observation

Teachers were asked whether appraisers gave them feedback after lesson observation. Out of 43 teachers who indicated that principals carried out lesson observation 30 (69.44%) indicated that they were given feedback. A small portion of teachers, 7 (16.67%), did not respond to the question while 6 (13.88%) indicated that they were not given feedback after lesson observation. Majority of teachers (69.44%) who responded to this item indicated that they were given feedback. Provision of feedback after lesson observations plays a critical role in teachers' professional development. The importance of providing feedback to the teacher after lesson observation is underscored by Chen (2018) who adds that provision of feedback helps provide solutions to teachers teaching problems. The appraiser is expected to hold a post observation session with the teacher to discuss teacher's performance in the lesson and pin point areas that require improvement. Failure to provide feedback after lesson observation leaves the teacher guessing about their performance in the lesson. Lesson observation fails to meet its purpose if feedback is not given to the teacher.

### Timing of the Feedback

The study also sought to establish the timing of the feedback. Out of 30 teachers who indicated that their

principal gave feedback 13 accounting for 43.3% indicated that it was given immediately after lesson observation while 17 (56.7%) indicated that it was given after some time. Real time provision of feedback enables the teacher to connect it with the lesson just observed, identify the errors and to develop and shape future teaching. As such the teacher can act on the areas pinpointed by the evaluator. Failure to provide feedback leaves the teacher speculating about their classroom practice. It also defeats the purpose of carrying out the observation. Provision of feedback in real time after lesson observation helps the teacher reflect on the lesson just concluded. Delayed feedback may not be useful as the teacher may not relate it to the lesson of interest.

### **Usefulness of Feedback Given to the Teacher After Lesson Observation.**

Teachers were asked to rate the usefulness of feedback given after observation. Eight out of 30 teachers who had indicated that they received feedback after lesson observation did not respond to this item. Majority of the teachers who received feedback, 13, accounting for 43.056% indicated that it was useful while 4 (13.33%) of the sampled teachers rated the feedback given as very useful. One teacher (4.7%) indicated that it was very un-useful, 2 (7%) teachers indicated that it was not useful and 2 (7%) teachers were undecided. This shows that majority of the teachers who responded to this item indicated that feedback given after lesson observation was useful. One teacher who rated the feedback given by the principal as useful explained that it was aimed at identifying teachers' weaknesses and helping them to improve teaching. Another teacher explained that principal advised the teacher on the most appropriate teaching-learning methodology to adopt. However, one of the teachers who indicated that feedback was not useful explained, "*Whenever feedback is given it is in form of a dress down*". On the part of the principals when asked whether they provided feedback after lesson observation all the 12 principals indicated that they did. One principal however noted that: '*Teachers are only receptive to positive feedback*'.

It is also evident that feedback given to the teacher after lesson observation may be misconceived to be driven by malice. This blands the purpose of lesson observation when teachers are only receptive to positive feedback from evaluators. This observation resonates the findings of Alshehri (2019) who observed that some teachers did not take feedback provided after observation positively. Provision of feedback to the teacher after lesson observation provides the observer an opportune time to discuss with the teacher how to address the gaps in their classroom practice. As such it should be packaged in a way that helps the teacher to enhance their classroom practice. Feedback given to the teacher should be objective and done with the sole aim of enhancing teacher's performance. According to Academic Development Institute (2017) feedback given to the teacher after observation should be in-depth, instruction specific and should be directed towards helping the teacher to learn about their practice. This requires the instructional leader to package the feedback in a way that assists the teacher to improve their classroom practice. If done correctly, feedback after lesson observation may enhance teachers' work performance and provide useful data for planning individual teacher's professional development programmes.

### **Conclusions**

Lesson observation is a useful tool in promoting teachers' professional development. However, as it is, it does not seem to promote teacher professional development as it is marred by fear of the implications of appraisal reports which may influence the decisions of the teachers' employer regarding teachers' professional growth. Lesson observation that is geared towards prompting teachers to renew their teaching practices and to refresh their knowledge in their teaching subjects would go a long way in promoting teachers' professional growth.

### **Recommendations**

Lesson observation should be aligned to teacher professional development and not mere compliance with Teachers Service Commission requirements. Teachers' Service Commission should train principals, deputy principals and heads of departments on how to package feedback given to teachers so as to optimize the benefits of lesson observation for teacher professional development.

Heads of departments should also be trained on the essence of conducting lesson observation. Additionally, the Teachers Service Commission should support schools by appointing adequate qualified Heads of Departments in order to underpin teachers' performance appraisal and development.

Adequate sensitization should be carried out for heads of departments and teachers who have specialized subject knowledge in order to strengthen efficacy in teacher professional development through lesson observation.

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