International Journal of Education and Social Development
ISSN: 3078-9931 (Print), ISSN: 3078-2287 (Online) | Vol. 5, No. 2, 2025

Research on the Implementation Effectiveness and Optimization Pathways of External Expert Classroom Observation and Evaluation

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Abstract: External expert classroom observation and evaluation is regarded as a significant mechanism for teaching quality monitoring and continuous improvement in higher education. Diagnostic insights and guidance are provided through an external professional perspective, which contributes to the enhancement of instructional competence and the promotion of teaching reform. Based on a practical case conducted at a university, implementation strategies—including expert team formation and evaluation system design—are examined, and both strengths and salient issues identified during classroom observations are analyzed. Findings indicate that while external evaluation effectively improves teaching standardization and feedback quality, it also reveals challenges such as inadequate classroom management, lack of innovation in instructional design, and suboptimal teaching pacing. Corresponding recommendations are proposed, focusing on strengthened application of evaluation outcomes, coordinated optimization of instructional design and classroom management, and the establishment of a cross-department collaborative educational mechanism. This study aims to provide reference for the development of more scientific and systematic teaching quality management systems in higher education institutions.

Keywords: External experts; classroom observation and evaluation; teaching quality; classroom management; teaching reform.

1. Research Background

Teaching supervision constitutes a crucial component of educational management in higher education. It is an integral part of the system for monitoring, evaluating, and assuring teaching quality, and provides essential support for comprehensively improving teaching effectiveness, maintaining orderly teaching processes, standardizing instructional activities, fostering the development of young teachers, and advancing teaching reform. As one specific form of such supervision, classroom teaching supervision serves not only as an important means of regulating teachers' instructional behaviors, but also as an effective pathway for enhancing teachers' professional competence and improving the overall quality of education provided by the institution.

Teaching supervision plays a positive guiding and stimulating role in the professional development of teachers, particularly young faculty members in universities. It helps to tap into teachers' potential and promotes the full realization of their educational and instructional capabilities. For instance, during the process of teachers' professional growth, relevant information is obtained by supervision experts through classroom observation and evaluation. This information is used not only to assess teaching practices but also to identify existing problems, thereby providing a basis for teachers to improve their instruction. Wu Mianhua, meanwhile, argues that "the role of teaching supervision is primarily reflected in promoting teaching reform, strengthening teaching management, setting exemplary teaching models, and improving teaching quality [1]."

Under the background of deep integration between educational informatization and the connotative development of higher education, classroom teaching quality is directly linked to the effectiveness of talent cultivation [2-3]. Internal teaching evaluations are often constrained by fixed perspectives and limited evaluator diversity [4]. The involvement of external experts in classroom observation and evaluation has been introduced, leveraging their cross-institutional experience and disciplinary expertise to offer more neutral, diversified, and professional instructional diagnosis. This has become an important initiative within the innovation of teaching quality assurance systems in higher education. Drawing on the practice of remote classroom observation and evaluation by external experts implemented at a specific university, this study aims to systematically summarize relevant experience, analyze identified problems, and propose pathways for optimization, with the goal of promoting sustained improvement in classroom teaching quality and supporting teacher professional development.

2. Research Design and Implementation

A case study approach was employed in this research, with the external expert classroom observation and evaluation initiative conducted at a university serving as the analytical case. An in-depth examination was carried out regarding its organization, implementation, and evaluation mechanism. This initiative spanned two academic semesters, encompassed multiple schools and diverse course types, and involved 15 experts invited from various universities and research institutions. The composition of the expert team was designed to include backgrounds from both regular undergraduate institutions and vocational colleges, with their respective professional fields covering the university's primary academic disciplines, thereby ensuring the professionalism and representativeness of the evaluation.

The evaluation work was conducted utilizing an online classroom observation system and a comprehensive teaching quality assessment platform. A structured classroom evaluation rubric was adopted, encompassing five dimensions:

"Values Education in the Classroom," "Teacher Competence," "Classroom Conditions," "Instructional Content," and "Other Aspects." This facilitated a systematic and standardized evaluation process. The specific criteria examined within each dimension are outlined below:

Values Education in the Classroom: The focus was placed on assessing whether the value orientation of the teaching was correct and whether the principle of "addressing appropriate topics while avoiding inappropriate ones" was implemented. This principle entails emphasizing mainstream values, cultural heritage, and practical innovation, while avoiding ambiguous boundaries, subjective assumptions, and erroneous viewpoints.

Teacher Competence: Evaluation primarily centered on whether the instructor's classroom demeanor and conduct conformed to the established behavioral standards for higher education faculty.

Classroom Conditions: This dimension included the assessment of several factors: the clarity of teaching objectives, the substantiality of classroom scheduling, the appropriateness of resource utilization, the proactiveness of student participation, the effectiveness of teacher-student interaction, and the overall efficacy of classroom instruction. Experts were required to evaluate these areas and provide corresponding suggestions for improvement.

Instructional Content: Emphasis was placed on evaluating the logical coherence of the content, its relevance to current frontiers in the field, its theoretical depth, the level of practical or experimental instruction, the explanation of core knowledge points, and the analysis of connections within the knowledge system. Following evaluation, experts were also expected to provide pertinent improvement suggestions.

Other Aspects: Experts were requested to evaluate any other aspects of classroom performance not covered by the aforementioned dimensions and to offer recommendations accordingly.

3. Analysis of Implementation Outcomes and Identified Issues

The classroom observation and evaluation initiative encompassed a comprehensive review of 112 course sessions delivered by 55 instructors across the institution. This extensive coverage included multiple academic units. The evaluated courses spanned a diverse range of types, from fundamental general education classes designed to build core competencies to specialized courses aimed at developing advanced disciplinary expertise. Analysis of the assessment data revealed a highly positive outcome, with 96% of the observed courses receiving ratings of "Excellent" or "Good." This high proportion strongly indicates that the foundational pedagogical skills among the faculty are robust and that the standard of classroom organization and delivery consistently meets established benchmarks for effective instruction.

A closer examination of the qualitative feedback and quantitative ratings identified several recurrent strengths characterizing the majority of courses. These pedagogical merits were primarily manifested in several key areas: the formulation of clearly articulated and achievable teaching objectives; the logical, coherent, and well-sequenced delivery of subject matter; the implementation of thoughtfully structured and fully utilized class sessions; the effective integration of contemporary developments and cutting-edge perspectives from within the discipline; and the adoption of varied and purposeful modes of student-instructor and student-student interaction. Notably, a significant number of instructors proactively employed a rich repertoire of interactive strategies to foster engagement. Techniques such as targeted questioning, structured small-group discussions, formal student-led presentations, organized in-class debates, and dynamic "mobile teaching" (where the instructor moves throughout the classroom) were frequently observed. The utilization of these methods was consistently linked to observable enhancements in classroom rapport, a more collaborative learning environment, and more immediate, efficient cycles of feedback between students and the instructor.

Despite these considerable strengths, the evaluation process also systematically uncovered a set of challenges and areas requiring targeted improvement. Firstly, concerns pertaining to classroom discipline and the overall learning atmosphere were noted in a noticeable subset of observations. These concerns were evidenced by recurring phenomena including frequent student disengagement—often described as a "high frequency of the 'head-down' posture"—a tendency for front-row seats to remain vacant, the prevalent non-instructional use of personal mobile devices, and occasional instances of students sleeping during lectures. Such patterns point to underlying inadequacies in proactive classroom management protocols and suggest a need for more effective strategies to stimulate and sustain students' intrinsic motivation for learning. Secondly, the evaluation pointed to certain shortcomings in the depth of instructional design and interactivity. A portion of the observed sessions remained predominantly teacher-centered, relying heavily on didactic lecture formats with limited incorporation of more engaged, student-active learning paradigms such as task-driven exercises or sustained project-based learning modules. Furthermore, evaluators often reported that the connection between theoretical course content and its practical, real-world applications—or its linkage to the evolving frontiers of the field—was tenuous or insufficiently emphasized. This perceived gap was found to negatively impact student perception of relevance and, consequently, their overall engagement levels. Thirdly, opportunities for refinement were identified in the domains of teaching pace and curricular scheduling. Isolated instances were observed where the volume or depth of content within a single session was deemed inadequate, or where the instructional rhythm was uneven, oscillating between periods of high density and lulls. Additionally, the practice of scheduling multiple sessions of conceptually similar or thematically consecutive courses in immediate succession was noted as a potential pedagogical concern. This scheduling pattern was critiqued for potentially contributing to cognitive fatigue among students, thereby diminishing their attention and impairing knowledge retention and overall learning effectiveness.

4. Proposed Optimization Strategies

4.1. Strengthening the Systematic Application and Feedback of Evaluation Results

A structured and institutionalized system for processing, analyzing, and applying evaluation outcomes should be established to ensure that the insights gained from classroom observations are translated into actionable improvements. This system should involve the systematic categorization of expert comments according to thematic areas—such as

instructional delivery, student engagement, assessment methods, and classroom climate—followed by the formulation of precise, individualized feedback reports. These reports ought to be disseminated formally to the relevant academic units and the instructors concerned, thereby facilitating targeted and evidence-based reflection. Furthermore, a series of thematic seminars and practice-oriented workshops could be organized around recurrent and critical issues identified during the evaluations, such as "strategies for effective classroom management," "designing meaningful interactive teaching sequences," and "using formative assessment to guide instruction." Such forums would provide opportunities for peer dialogue, guided reflection, and the sharing of effective practices. Additionally, a structured approach to comparative analysis should be adopted, encompassing both horizontal comparisons across similar courses or instructors at the same career stage and vertical comparisons tracking the developmental trajectory of individual instructors over multiple observation cycles. This analytical process would enable the distillation of generalized pedagogical insights and the formulation of coherent, personalized professional development plans, thereby closing the loop between evaluation and improvement.

4.2. Promoting Student-Centered Instructional Design and Classroom Reform

To foster a shift from teacher-directed instruction to learner-centered pedagogies, instructors should be actively encouraged and supported in adopting evidence-based instructional models that prioritize active student engagement. Pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and structured cooperative learning are recommended, as they enhance the authenticity and complexity of classroom tasks while promoting higher-order thinking and collaborative skills. Correspondingly, the design of learning activities should be intentionally aligned with these models to increase cognitive and social participation. Concurrently, the integration of course content with real-world professional practice, current technological advancements, and relevant social contexts must be deliberately reinforced. Such integration not only improves the perceived relevance and appeal of the curriculum but also strengthens learners' identification with the subject matter and its application. From an organizational perspective, course scheduling should be approached more scientifically, informed by principles of cognitive load theory and student attention spans. The consecutive scheduling of thematically or cognitively similar courses should be avoided to prevent student fatigue and diminish returns on learning. Instead, teaching rhythms and content loads should be distributed in a balanced manner across the academic timetable to sustain student motivation and optimize knowledge retention.

4.3. Constructing a Cross-Departmental Collaborative Educational and Management Mechanism

It is recommended that an integrated and sustainable collaborative framework be formally established among key functional units, including teaching administration, student affairs, and information technology support services. This mechanism should be designed to align policies, resources, and initiatives that collectively impact the teaching and learning environment. Through joint efforts, clear and consistently applied classroom discipline standards can be developed and communicated, providing a common reference for both instructors and students. Simultaneously, innovative approaches to cultivating a positive academic ethos—such as mentorship programs, learning community initiatives, and recognition systems for academic engagement—should be co-designed and implemented. The goal is to foster a classroom culture that is simultaneously focused, inclusive, and participatory, thereby enhancing both academic rigor and student belonging. Such intentional coordination across administrative, pedagogical, and support domains is essential for realizing a synergistic "teaching-learning-management" model. This holistic approach ensures that institutional structures, pedagogical practices, and student support services are aligned toward the common objective of facilitating comprehensive student development, thereby creating an ecosystem that consistently reinforces educational quality and student success.

5. Conclusion

External expert classroom observation and evaluation offers a valuable external perspective and professional support for enhancing teaching quality in higher education. It plays a significant role in revealing the actual state of classroom instruction and in promoting teacher reflection and professional growth. By systematically summarizing implementation experiences, focusing on identified issues, and deepening the utilization of evaluation results, this mechanism can further facilitate teaching reform and optimize the organization and management of instruction. Consequently, it may provide sustained support for the comprehensive improvement of talent cultivation quality in the higher education sector.

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