
Types of Observation Methods in Translanguaging Multilingual Classes, Reliability and Ethics Involved

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ABSTRACT: *The use of the observation method in a classroom takes different dimensions according to the subject and practices the researcher wants. A translanguaging class possess its own unique challenges to the researcher. Amongst the many is who, what, where, when and how to observe the practices. These scenarios are answered with the researcher taking the role of a complete participant observer, participant as observer, observer as participant or as complete observer. These roles are discussed in line with five translanguaging classroom practices and their possible challenges. Reliability and validity of using observation is discussed together with related ethical issues in the last section. Observation can be used when the researcher is satisfied with the conditions which have to be created in order to collect the needed data. Race, religion, language and attitude are some aspects which have to be dealt with when conducting such a study in the new environment where the researcher is alien.*

KEY WORD: Translanguaging, classroom observation, reliability, ethics

INTRODUCTION

Observation method is a strand of the qualitative method on one hand while it is also dominant in experiment data collection in the quantitative method. What is prominent in both is that data is collected, and informed decisions are made basing on the observed behaviour. Gold (1997) says it was possible to develop a standardised procedure that could maximise observational efficacy, minimise investigator bias, and allow for replication or to check out the degree to which these procedures have enabled the investigator to produce valid, reliable data that, when incorporated into his or her published reports, will be regarded by peers as objective findings. It is through this that observation has been considered to be a reliable method of data collection through its different strands. This article sets out to discuss the challenges of observation method in a translanguaging multilingual literacy class.

observation as a research method deals with ‘that kind of a research characterised by a prolonged period of intense social interaction between the researcher and the subjects, in the

milieu of the latter, during which time data, in the form of field notes, are unobtrusively and systematically collected' (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003:116). Therefore, a language class observation needs to be well organised so that the researcher can have a clear picture of what is needed to be observed and how to observe it. Other skills needed in an observation include listening, participating, contributing, pursuing, questioning, communicating, interacting, sharing, refraining, retreating, negotiating, timing, recording, describing, and so on (Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003: 117). These skills are key for a focused classroom observation and for reliable data collection procedure.

A translanguaging class has unique principles which needs critical attention in order to make meaning of the learning and support plurilingual practice instruction. Garcia and Sylvan (2011) says these are; heterogeneity, collaboration, learner-centeredness, language and content integration, language use from students up and experiential learning among others. These are usually linked to how a classroom observer can maximise the classroom potential and make meaning of the teaching and learning situation while language dynamism is at play. A translanguaging class has a unique classroom setting which the researcher conducting observations must acclimatise to in order to collect reliable data. Therefore, the different observation methods the researcher uses have to make him or her suit the classroom environment because variables have to be observed in their natural environment in qualitative studies (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The four observation methods are then linked to a translanguaging literacy classroom.

Complete participant in a translanguaging class

The observer should take the role of complete participant so that he or she becomes part of the teacher or learner in the lesson. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:543) says a complete participant is a member of the group who conceals his or her role as an observer, whose knowledge of the group or institution maybe intimate and who may gain 'insider knowledge', but who may be viewed with suspicion and resentment by the other members when his or her role come to light and who may lack the necessary objectivity to observe reliably. The researcher in a literacy class can become a complete observer in class. He or she has to act as an assistant teacher so as to be welcomed in the class.

Observing and understanding linguistic diversity in a classroom needs the researcher to ensure that he or she becomes part of the learners and learn with them as well as from them. However, the age will reveal his or her presence in that class. Through participant observation, the researcher is able to get closer to the truth and observe valid linguistic behaviour from the learner in a natural environment. The different potentials learners come with to class are understood and explanations regarding why they respond in a certain manner can be explained to this effect. A good example is the observation taking place with the consideration of the Heterogeneity and singularities in plurality at play (Garcia and Sylvan, 2011). The learners do not have the phobia to see the researcher as an intruder, but as a teacher teaching them. To this, the classroom becomes a natural environment for the learners to engage into the classroom activities.

Cummins (2005; 2008) notes that languages which are in the learner's environment should not be separated from them but should be utilised in the teaching and learning process. In teaching a plurilingual classes as in the Zambian context, all languages of the learners have to be appreciated and used in the learning process. Garcia and Sylvan (2011) holds that the approach used by international high schools of working with language minority students should be adopted. They argue that it is significant to optimise the heterogenic as it builds on the strength of every single individual member of the school community. Relating this to the classroom observation, the researcher has to overcome the challenge of understanding that the different learners have their own different languages and cultures which are being used by the teacher in order to learn the new concepts in class. By doing so, the researcher needs to change positions in order to have a clear understanding of the learning and teaching taking place in. The complete observer needs to also realise the classroom practices of the second principle in the translanguaging class which rests on the collaboration amongst student. This provides collaborative structures that build on the strength of every individual member of the school community and optimise learning (Garcia and Sylvan, 2011). Through collaboration, students are able to share their different perspectives, experiences, and talents in class which is unique from the monolingual classroom. The researcher has to be part of the lesson and the group in order to observe the kind of linguistic interaction taking place in the collaboration process. The presence of another teacher can be a distractor for the data collection process since the teacher and the learners maybe creating an artificial environment. The other challenge of this method is that the teacher may not be willing to help with the research thereby getting permission unnecessarily or pretending to be ill. The researcher remains with children to observe without instruction.

To this, it can also be seen that class observation in a translanguaging class is inseparable from ethnography because ethnographers infer from people's talk, behaviour and tools (Borofsky, 1994). Through collaboration, the researcher is able to tap into the learner's mind and make inferences regarding their classroom actions and linguistic usage since he or she is with them in the natural environment. The challenge for the complete participant is that he or she may fail to integrate into the classroom due to linguistic barriers and not learning to reach the goals of the school. The other challenge is that the researcher will be unable to observe all the learners since the enrolment may differ from school to school. Even when cameras and recorders can be placed in class, it may not be possible to observe and analyse all the translanguaging processes which happens because other learners speak slowly, yet their contribution to the study might be vital.

Participant as observer in a translanguaging class

In other words, the observer is made known to the group together with his or her role as an observer (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In the literacy class where translanguaging is used, collaboration and learner centeredness are used to make learners interact and share knowledge. In doing so, the researcher is also relegated to the learners so that linguistic practices are recorded at all times.

In relation to participant as observer, it is important that there is a rehearsal with the teacher who owns the classes so that the setting of the class is explained. Most literacy classes are set in a manner that learners sit in groups of three desks. This then makes the teacher to ensure that the right children are focused upon since other learners are already proficient in many languages and they are scaffolding others in the target language. With such knowledge, the observer will easily adapt into this new community and his or her observation will be directed on idea tools and artefacts as well as in public interaction and the private thinking which is taking place in the few children (Cole, 1996). In the classroom groups, the researcher will also direct his linguistic knowledge to the identified learners who are leading the discussion and providing some interpretation to others as well as the ones listening and contributing to the public interaction in the group.

Understanding the new teaching and learning pedagogy can be misleading to new researchers at times especially when they enter a class to observe a lesson and finds the arrangement is different from what they imagined, and the learners may have a challenge of coping up with the instrument he or she may use to collect data. Despite Johnson and Bolstad (1973) noting that research procedures should insure that observers are maintaining their skills during an observation study so that they can observe what is agreed upon in research, the minority students may find it challenging to open up and present their linguistic thoughts freely before a stranger since they are intimidated already. It is for this reason that Fred and Semmel (1978) add that the observer must quickly adapt to the learner's culture as that is what will enable him or her to understand the community (classroom) and its practices. All these practices are pre-planned by the teachers and at the end of the day learning is taking place within the learners and in class. In most Zambian classes, culture plays a key role on how quickly the researcher is supposed to adapt to the learners and their environment and vice versa.

Observer as participant in a translanguaging classroom

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:543) explains that:

the observer as participant is not a member of the group under study but may participate a little or peripherally in the group's activities, and whose role as researcher is clear and overt, as unobtrusive as possible, without being observed always knowing who is the researcher, and whose access to information and people maybe incomplete and restricted.

The challenge with a translanguaging class when using this method is that the researcher is detached from reality and observes from a distance. This makes the researcher to be more of a control than as a researcher because he or she is ensuring the variables are as planned.

In addition, Simpson and Tuson (2003) notes that if you are observing in someone else's workplace it is useful to pay at least one preliminary visit and watch a 'typical' session of teaching and learning. This would help the researcher to identify some of the practical problems you may encounter in conducting a formal observation. It is unfortunate for the observer that pupils in classrooms are now much more mobile than they used to be especially in a

translanguaging class due to the nature of the principles. Kothari (2004) adds that the merit for observer as participant method is that the researcher is enabled to record the natural behaviour of the group and have a real experience of the natural environment in which learning is taking place, in this case, with minimum control. With the intervention, it is a challenge for the natural environment to be maintained with an outside in class. Learners are intimidated in most cases especially when cameras are placed in class to focus on their behaviour. In most rural schools, any person who is not their teacher may not get the natural environment or setting for data collection until the learners gain confidence and become familiar to the learners. The needed data may not be collected in such an atmosphere unless serious adjustments are made.

Complete observer in a translanguaging class

A complete observer is a researcher who is part of the community but his or her role is unknown to any person and looks unconcerned or unsuspecting (Copper and Schindler, 2001). Complete observers may collect data in form of photographs, art objects, videotapes, or any forms of sound (Creswell, 2009). In a translanguaging class, a complete observer may fix some microphones on strategic positions or a video recorder so that the actual teaching is not interrupted at any time. Language researching calls for the researcher to be inside the classroom in one way or the other. When the environment seems compromised or intimidating, equipment can be used to capture all the classroom proceedings. To this, Anderson-Levitt (2003) contends that researchers who study topics in education are insiders to some degree because formal schooling is more uniform than we might think. Therefore, translanguaging practices are similar in practice especially when using experiential technique in teaching language.

Through observation, researchers can also uncover factors that are important for a thorough understanding of the research problem that were unknown when the study was designed. This is the great advantage of this method because, although the truthful answers might be realised research questions asked, it may not be always that the right questions are asked. Therefore, by standing observing what is happening in the classroom without disturbing the learners it makes the researcher have the best understanding of the phenomenon being studied since they will all behave in a natural manner (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest and Namey, 2011). The challenge is that the researcher may not gather the true reflection of the teaching and learning situation in class because of being completely detached from the area of interest. A translanguaging class needs the researcher to be inside the class and not to watch from the peripheral.

The advantage of using observation in qualitative research in a translanguaging class is that it tends to have a small field of focus and fragmented the observed into minute chunks that can be subsequently aggregated into variables (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The observer has an advantage over the other methods of data collection because of being immersed in the classroom and can interact, listen to the language learners are using and then make meaning from the situation. Watts (2011) add that the observer records the class happening and goes to re-examine the notes in comparison to the picture, audio or video recordings from the class. Despite such merits, there is need to consider how ethical issues which need considering in using classroom observation in a translanguaging class.

Reliability and validity of observation

It is difficult to discuss reliability and validity of findings when using observation without considering the types of observations to be considered. Sometimes it is impractical to assign pairs of observers to each classroom. In fact, in order to maximize the number of visits to each classroom, and to minimize observer effects, one observer per visit is most desirable provided that "each recorder observes each individual at least once and observes every individual the same number of times. This number may vary across recorders-one recorder may see all individuals twice; another may see them three times each (Medley & Mitzel, 1958).

Reliability and validity in qualitative research and observation method is repetitive rather than linear, so that a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis (Guba, 1981). In addition, Morse *et al.* (2001) add that observed data are systematically checked, focus is maintained, and the fit of data and the conceptual work of analysis and interpretation are monitored and confirmed constantly. Verification strategies help the researcher identify when to continue, stop or modify the research process in order to achieve reliability and validity and ensure consistency.

Further, reliability and validity of observed data has to deal with some clarification of conceptions. Wilkinson (2000) mention that the researcher has to deal with different interpretation of data and on the decision as to which angle of the observed data was correct and worthy considering. It is in this line that the observations take different dimensions, and they last for a longer period of time instead of once. Further, validity and reliability of observed data is enhanced with researcher's taking up of different roles as; complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant and as complete observers (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). All these roles enable the researcher to use field notes, audio recorders, pictures and videos to gather data for a study. The divergent methods of observation data collection enable the observed data to be authentic and reliable. Without considering these aspects of validity and reliability, the researcher faces challenges of authenticating observable data to other researchers and ethical issues rise at this particular time. Therefore, repeating the study in the same environment may not produce the same results because the participants may change their behaviour, especially in a qualitative study.

Ethical considerations in observation method

The use of observation method in a translanguaging class has to take a number of ethical considerations before, during and after conducting the observation. Firstly, is the informed consent. The informed consent becomes a challenge in that the researcher cannot make every person grant permission in a group, community or even a classroom (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Watts (2011) also argue that informed consent in this context has to attend to some cultural dimension of observation like observing the cultural norms of that community. In schools, it's the head teachers to grant permission as well as the teachers while the children are not asked in most cases which is unethical in research.

There is also a quandary on the right to privacy with regards to the observation methods the researcher is using to collect data. AERA (1992) state that every individual with regardless of status in the society should be respected. In relation to observation, there is need to get permission from every pupil for them to be captured on video and audio recording even on pictures. They need protection despite being in schools under the authorities, they have their personal right to accept or decline to take part in any form of observation. Their lack of voice in schools should not be capitalised upon. Pupils might also need the consent from their parents or guardians and other relevant authorities depending on the topic under research like respecting children's right.

Beneficence is another ethical issue which comes when observation takes place. This concept deals with basic rules; do not harm and maximise possible benefits and minimise possible harms (AERA, 1992). The students and the school should be explained to the possible benefits and risk involved in taking part in the study. When using classroom observation, the learners are supposed to be informed the benefits they will accrue from the study and the risks involved so that they can make informed decisions either to take part or not. This would even make the researcher to choose the most appropriate observation method when the learners are informed on the beneficence.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the four observation methods of data collection have been discussed in relation to the translanguaging class application so that researchers can maximise the research potential. The paper has also deliberated on the reliability and validity surrounding observation method while ethical considerations have closed the discussion on the challenges of observation in a translanguaging class. Observation can be used when the researcher is satisfied with the conditions which have to be created in order to collect the needed data. Race, religion, language and attitude are some aspects which have to be dealt with when conducting such a study in the new environment where the researcher is alien. The spring of technology brings about an autonomous advantage to the researchers who would use observation methods of data collection as data can be collected remotely in any class with or without the knowledge of the participants.

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