

Classroom Observation System of the Teaching Staff of the Estonian National Defence College

Approved by

Col. Martin Herem

Commandant of the ENDC

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General Provisions

1. The classroom observation system (hereinafter: *the observation system*) of the Estonian National Defence College (hereinafter: the ENDC) is based on the foundations of the quality management and assurance of an institution of higher education, on the teacher competency model, as well as on the documents ensuring the quality of the teaching staff and teaching process. The observation system is considered as part of the quality assurance system of the ENDC study process.

Terms used:

1. Study process: observed lecture, seminar, field exercise, etc.
2. The teacher – a teacher whose class is observed;
3. The observer – a teacher who observes a class.

Purpose and organisation of observation

1. Purposes of the observation system are as follows:
 - a. To enhance the professional development (incl. methodological activities) of the teaching staff of the ENDC;
 - b. To give feedback to teacher teaching;
 - c. To improve the study process by sharing with colleagues;
 - d. To enhance the communication and exchange of experiences between the teaching staff;
 - e. To improve integration between subjects.
2. The observation system applies to all members of the ENDC teaching staff hired full-time who teach according to the curricula of higher education (except during their 1st year of work following the mentorship system);
3. Participation in the observation system is part of the standard workload of the teaching staff and is an integral part of their work.
4. Each academic year a focus is set for the observation system (except for the academic year 2014/15) with the purpose of focussing on the particular theme of the study process to be emphasized as needed.
5. The focus of the observation system for a particular year shall be articulated in a seminar of the teaching staff at the beginning of the each academic year. The selection of the theme to be observed is based on previous feedback forms, on results of the satisfaction survey of the ENDC and on students' feedback to subjects.
6. Every teacher participates in the observation system at least once per academic year as a teacher observed and once as an observer.
7. Classroom observation takes place according to the list compiled by the board of mentors and approved by Chief of the Education Department of the ENDC and Commander of the

Non-commissioned Officer School of the ENDC (except for the academic year 2014/15). The list is compiled for one academic year.

8. To increase integration between subjects, the list is compiled so that the observer and teacher are from different chairs, subfields or subgroups.
9. The list determines the pairs of teachers and observers. The observer and teacher are responsible for the observation taking place.
10. The time and place of the classroom observation is agreed upon between the teacher and observer after making the list public.
11. Before the classroom observation, the observer should have an overview of the subject (to have an overview of the subject as a whole), and of the class to be observed (to prepare questions regarding studies).
12. During the classroom observation, the observer fills out an observation form chosen by him/her among the observation forms given in Appendix 3 of these Regulations, or else the questions regarding studies shall be agreed upon based on the issues regarding studies presented by the teacher. The observation forms form the basis for post-observation feedback and statistics.
13. The classroom observation is followed by a discussion between the observer and teacher in order to give feedback on the class observation. The time and place of the discussion are agreed upon between them, but it should take place no later than five working days after the class observation.
14. Feedback includes three parts:
 - a. Teacher self-analysis (Appendix 1);
 - b. Discussion between the observer and teacher (Appendix 2);
 - c. Observer remarks (Appendix 3).
15. The recommendations made to the teacher during the feedback session are advisory in nature.
16. The observation form is presented to the coordinator of the board of mentors to record the observation and for statistics.
17. Presenting of observation sheets to the coordinator of the board of mentors is advisory. The presenting/not presenting the observation sheet is agreed by the teacher and observer during their discussion after the observation.
18. The aim of collecting observation sheets is to identify recurrent problems in the study process and to complement the feedback given by students. The results of observation sheets are generalized, analysis results are used for organising teacher training courses methods, for choosing the themes for in-house teacher training seminars and for improving the observation system.
19. In the event that observation sheets are not presented to the coordinator of the board of mentors, an observation shall be fixed in the minutes signed by the teacher and observer. The minutes of the observation shall include the following information: the name of the teacher, the name of the observer, the time of observation and the subject observed. Observation minutes are managed by the coordinator of the board of mentors.
20. The round-up of observations of an academic year is made board of mentors during an in-house teacher training seminar no later than at the beginning of the following academic year.

Appendix 1. Teacher self-analysis model

Appendix 2. Principles of classroom observation and giving feedback

Appendix 3. Observation forms and a selection of issues for observation

Tanel Otsus

Master Sergeant

Coordinator of the Board of Mentors

Appendix 1. Teacher self-analysis model

Feedback is appropriate only when given in a positive and constructive manner.

Questions to the teacher after observation

- What worked well for you in the class and why? What could be done better?
- How did I involve and encourage students?
- Did I manage to make them learn? How?
- On what basis did I decide upon the achievement of outcomes?
- What did I learn from this class?
- What other methods could be applied to teach the same topic?
- Is there anything that could be done differently next time? Specify.

(Moon, J. 2004. A Handbook of reflective and experiential learning: theory and practice. London: Routledge Falmer Press).

The Saka Circle (see p. 4 of the Estonian document for figure)

ME AS A TEACHER (at the centre of the drawing, the following steps form a never-ending circle/loop in the following order)

1. Description: What did I do?
2. Evaluation: How did it go?
3. Giving reasons: Why did it go in this way?
4. Connecting: What did I learn from it?
5. Planning: What shall I do next?
6. Experiencing: Implementing new activity.

The Saka Circle (designed during the joint seminar of Tartu University and Tallinn University teachers in Saka manor house on 23-24 August 2006).

Effective feedback helps the teacher to answer 3 questions:

- Where am I headed (objectives)? (Feed Up)
- How have I been doing so far? (Feed Back)
- What will be my next steps? (Feed forward)

Appendix 2. Principles of classroom observation and giving feedback

Classroom observation is more efficient if the following aspects are considered:

- The objective of the observation is agreed upon before observation;
- The observer takes notes during the observation;
- At the end of the class a short feedback session takes place and the time for the post-observation session is agreed upon. The post-observation session can also take place immediately after the class, but this takes time. A room is also needed to avoid interruptions and disturbances.

Agreement before observation

The teacher gives an overview of his/her class (e.g. by e-mail).

This overview includes a description of the topic and its volume and place in the curriculum as a whole.

Who are the students?

What are the objectives of the class?

Is it a new topic or is it a continuation of a topic from a previous class?

What aspects does the teacher himself/herself want observed in his/her class? (This is very important! It's impossible to work on all aspects at once!)

Feedback session after observation

Feedback is purposeful only if given positively and in a constructive manner.

The following aspects should be considered when giving feedback.

- Place the aspects/remarks in the order of importance and concentrate on the needs of the teacher before starting with feedback.
- First, let the teacher to analyse the class. What did he/she enjoy about the class? What did he/she not like about the class? Were the aims of the class achieved?
- Make constructive recommendations. Repeat positive aspects again at the end of the discussion.
- Base your feedback on notes and avoid being judgemental. Try to keep objective activities that took place in the classroom apart from your interpretations of them.
- Involve the teacher in the class analysis by asking questions and asking for comment on his/her actions and giving reasons. This way it is easier to draw attention to negative aspects and provide constructive criticism. If the teacher is unable to identify any problem areas the observer should bring them to his/her attention.
- Round up and reflect on the aspects that need improvement.
- Encourage the teacher to find solutions, make decisions and take responsibility.

OBSERVATION FORM (Teacher based)

How did the teacher attract the attention of the audience?

Which teaching methods did the teacher use in the classroom?

Which methods did the teacher use to check whether the topic was understood?

What was the proportion of active student involvement (e.g. asked and answered questions, participated in group work)?

What aids did the teacher use to visualize the topic?

What examples did the teacher bring with regard to illustrate the application of the topic (incl. in future service)?

OBSERVATION FORM (Observer based)

How would I (i.e. the observer) attract the attention of the audience instead of the observed teacher?

Which teaching methods could also be used to deliver the observed class efficiently?

Which methods would I use to check whether the topic was understood by students?

How to increase the active participation/involvement of students in the classroom?

In my opinion which aids would help better illustrate the topic?

A Selection of issues for observation

Preparations

Creating conditions for observation: a decent room, availability of equipment (chalk, marker, a cloth or sponge to clean the board, technical equipment for and equipment for tests, etc.)

Activation of the previous knowledge necessary for the acquisition of a new topic.

Clarity and understandability

Brings illustrative examples

Relates the material to its possible fields of use in reality/in future service

The teacher attracts interest the interest of students in the topic studied (creating motivation)

Layout

Explains to students the structure of a lecture/seminar

Sets goals

Shaping/reinforcing/application of skills

Variety of activities

Involving students

Activates previous knowledge necessary for the acquisition of a new topic.

Asks questions to check for students' understanding

Discusses the solutions of tasks with students

Allows students to demonstrate their skills

Creates opportunities for discussion

Encourages independent thinking

Creates opportunities for self-analysis

Interaction with students

Follows student activity and gives feedback

Directs student activity (does not do the job for them).

Conclusions

Getting feedback from students

Allows students to demonstrate and apply their knowledge

At the end of the class the planned objectives are achieved.

- How does he/she set up the learning environment?
- What are the learning outcomes and how does assessment take place?
- Is the topic linked to a real life situation and/or specialty? (i.e., “Why do we actually study this?”) If so, how?

Teaching methods and forms of study

- What is the proportion of teacher activity and student activity during the class?
- How does he/she provide conditions for active learning for each student?
- Does he/she give opportunities for discussions between students? (e.g., pair work, group work) If so, how?
- Do all students acquire the necessary information? How does that manifest itself?

Social skills and learning skills

- How does the teacher develop interpersonal skills?
- Does he/she create the right conditions for cooperation between students? If so, how?
- Do students evaluate their own and each other’s work?

Learner development

- Do the tasks enable creative thinking?
- Does he/she ensure that each student is able to perform the tasks? How does he/she ensure that every student understands the tasks and what is required of him/her?
- Is the pace of the class appropriate for the students?
- Do the students let the teacher know if they cannot understand or catch up? If so, how?
- How does the teacher improve student self-confidence, increase the sense of responsibility, and facilitate and direct their self-motivated study process (e.g., encouraging, enabling, giving feedback)?

Summary of a lecture

- How did the lecture end? Were the desired learning outcomes achieved?
- How did the teacher reflect on the achievement of the learning outcomes? And the students? Did they have the chance to articulate what they have studied?
- Did the students have the opportunity to give feedback on the lecture? If so, how?

Conclusions, analysis and future actions

What was successful and why? In the teacher’s opinion, what should have been done differently? In the observer’s opinion, what should have been done differently? What should be improved? How could the lesson be made more efficient?

Observation form (II)

Clarity and understandability

Uses the blackboard/whiteboard properly and/or has prepared an appropriate PowerPoint presentation

In the case of tests (experiments), introduces their organisation

In the case of tests (experiments), can make a clear difference between what was seen and what was concluded

Uses illustrative examples

Repeats and emphasises more complicated points

Links the material with possible practice applications

Emphasises what is important

Speaks with appropriate pace

Good diction

Appropriate strength of voice

Layout/organisation

Summarises a previous lecture or seminar

Sets goals

Explains to students the structure of the lecture/seminar

Gives an introductory overview

Transitions from one topic to another are clear

Gives a summary at the end

Involving students

Considers prior knowledge of students

Encourages students to ask questions

Answers questions

Asks questions

Gives tasks to students

Discusses with students the solution process of tasks

Gives the students the chance to demonstrate their skills

Creates possibilities for discussion

Interaction with students

Attracts the attention of the audience

Starts and ends on time

Is attentive to students

Addresses the students by name

Has friendly attitude toward students

Allows short breaks

Observation form (III)

Preparations for study process

Providing conditions for the study process: proper room in good condition, provision of study aids (chalk, markers, black/whiteboard eraser, equipment for experiments and technical equipment, etc.)
Presenting the objectives of the study process (clarity)

Study process

Behaviour of the teacher and presentation skills (mobility, using hands and voice, eye contact with students, self-confidence, etc.)

Administrative issues (starting and ending the class)

Using technical equipment (appropriateness, using it in a purposeful manner, legible text)

Skills for using audio-visual study aids

Skills for using handout materials

Layout/organisation of the class, its parts, logical sequence of parts

Linking new material with prior knowledge and/or real life

Presenting new information

Following the main topic, ability to point out the most important points

Developing the skills for reinforcement and application

Getting feedback from students

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Teaching methods correspond to set objectives

Attracts and directs the attention of students

Encourages independent thinking

Knows and can apply evaluation and control measures

Interaction skills and correctness of the teacher

Cooperation between teacher and students, ability to engage student interest

Considering feedback from students

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Observation form (IV)

Introduction and lead-in

- Beginning/introduction is well-prepared.
- The teacher informs students about the objectives of the class.
- The teacher creates interest in the subject (creating motivation).
- Prior knowledge necessary to learn a new subject is covered.

Learning

- Relevance of the content (including selected materials and methods used).
- The teacher links new information to prior knowledge.
- The teacher considers the level of students.
- The teacher uses various teaching methods.
- The teacher asks questions to check the comprehension of students.
- The teacher follows the activities of students and gives feedback.
- Diversity/variety of learning activities.
- The teacher corrects mistakes and clarifies ambiguities in case of misunderstanding.
- The teacher offers opportunities for both cooperative and independent learning.
- The pace of the lecture is appropriate.

Reflection and bringing the lecture to a conclusion

- The teacher rounds off and reviews the main points/topics of the lecture.
- The teacher allows students to demonstrate or apply what they studied.
- The teacher gives homework (this can be done in some other part of the lecture).
- Involves the students in the assessment of learning objectives.
- The teacher ensures that the conclusion of the lecture is an integral part of the previous parts of the lecture.

Observation form (V)

Practical training

Layout of the practical training class

- The study process starts and ends on time.
- The amount of work is within students' capabilities.
- At the beginning of the class an objective is set and there is discussion on what they aim to achieve.
- The planned objectives are achieved by the end of the class.

Instructions for work

- The teacher introduces the fundamentals of the task.
- The instructions are available (on paper, computer, etc.).
- The instructions are sufficiently detailed and clear.

Organisation of work

- The students work individually.
- The students work in pairs or small groups.
- There is an assistant/tutor to help the teacher.
- The work is subdivided into stages.
- It is clear how the outcome/findings/results should be presented.
- The task provides the prerequisites for enhancing creativity.
- Use of technical aids is reasonable (choice is appropriate, well-positioned, safely used) and purposeful.

Activities of the teacher

- Is attentive to students.
- Answers student questions (answers individually, does not speak too loud).
- Directs the activities of students (but does not do the job for them).
- Praises and encourages students.
- Directs students so that they can find the answers to their questions in the instructions or on the Internet (i.e., does not enable learned helplessness).
- Supports and directs cooperation between students.
- Makes reference to prior knowledge necessary to learn a new subject.
- Provides opportunities for self-analysis.
- Involves students in assessing the set objectives.

Appendix 2. Principles of classroom observation and giving feedback

The aim of class observation is to give feedback to the teacher and enhance his/her development

Agreement before observation

The parties agree on the time and location of observation. The teacher gives an overview of his/her class (e.g., by e-mail). This overview includes a description of the topic and its volume and place in the curriculum as a whole. Who are the students? What are the objectives of the class? Is it a new topic or is it a continuation of a topic from a previous class? What aspects does the teacher himself/herself want observed in his/her class? (This is very important! It's impossible to work on all aspects at once!)

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- At the end of the class a short feedback session takes place and the time for the post-observation session is agreed upon. The post-observation session can also take place immediately after the class, but this takes time. A room is also needed to avoid interruptions and disturbances.
- First, the teacher has the opportunity to analyse (evaluate, reflect on) his/her class.
- The observer then gives constructive feedback based on facts and notes, rather than suppositions/guesswork.
- At the end of the observation, major points should be concluded.

Feedback session after observation

- Find a room where no-one will disturb you and make sure you have enough time.
- First, elicit feedback from the teacher by asking him/her to analyse the class. What did he/she enjoy about the class? What did he/she not like about the class? Were the aims of the class achieved?
- As an observer, start positively at all times, name positive aspects/parts of the class, and only then address the less successful aspects. Make constructive recommendations. Repeat positive aspects again at the end of the discussion.
- Place the aspects/remarks in the order of importance and concentrate on the most important ones.
- Base your feedback on notes and avoid being judgemental. Try to keep objective activities that took place in the classroom apart from your interpretations of them.
- Involve the teacher in the class analysis by asking questions and asking for comment on his/her actions and giving reasons. This way it is easier to draw attention to negative aspects and provide constructive criticism. If the teacher is unable to identify any problem areas the observer should bring them to his/her attention.
- Listen attentively and use appropriate body language.
- Round up and reflect on the aspects that need improvement.
- Encourage the teacher to find solutions, make decisions and take responsibility.

- Take brief notes of the discussion points and agreements (future objectives and actions).