

# Non-Evaluative Classroom Observations: A Framework For Professional Growth and Pedagogical Excellence

Dr. James McLaughlin, DBA, MEd

Executive Office, 1TEAM Innovation

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## ABSTRACT

Persistent deficiencies in teacher training continue to hinder progress toward pedagogical excellence. In the absence of consensus among colleagues, administrators, and students regarding instructional challenges, traditional evaluation methods fail to facilitate substantive professional growth. High-stakes assessments frequently result in anxiety, defensiveness, and superficial compliance rather than authentic improvement. This article presents a framework for nonjudgmental classroom observation, detailing its theoretical underpinnings, core principles, and methodologies. Drawing on empirical research from K-12, higher education, and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, it demonstrates that non-evaluative observation preserves professional dignity during development. The framework comprises three stages: pre-observation goal-setting and relationship-building, structured formative observation centered on inquiry, and post-observation reflective dialogue to support self-directed growth. In contrast to traditional evaluative models that prioritize accountability, this approach conceptualizes classroom observation as a collaborative learning process facilitated by peer teachers, instructional coaches, counselors, and other staff members. Evidence from diverse educational settings indicates that fostering psychological safety and trust enables meaningful pedagogical development, enhances teacher self-efficacy, and cultivates a culture of continuous professional growth. The article concludes with practical recommendations for educational leaders, policymakers, and professional development coordinators to implement non-evaluative observation systems that recognize skill differences, uphold professional dignity, and advance authentic teaching excellence.

**Keywords:** non-evaluative observation, professional development, formative supervision, peer observation, teaching quality, pedagogical excellence, cognitive coaching, reflective practice, teacher self-efficacy

## INTRODUCTION

### Confronting Complex Realities in Classroom Environments

Variations in teaching effectiveness are widely recognized within the school community. Students notice differences in instructional clarity, classroom management, and engagement strategies. Colleagues observe pedagogical distinctions during planning sessions and informal discussions. Administrators identify performance disparities through student achievement data, parent feedback, and classroom observations. Despite this collective recognition, institutional responses are often insufficient, ranging from punitive measures that may foster defensiveness to inaction, which allows ineffective practices to persist (O'Leary & Savage, 2020).

Historically, teacher quality has been addressed through evaluative observation systems that prioritize accountability and performance management over professional development (Noben et al., 2022). In these systems, classroom observation serves as a high-stakes assessment tool, measuring teachers against predetermined criteria that can affect employment status, salary progression, or professional reputation (Gunn, 2018). When observation is primarily evaluative, the psychological conditions necessary for genuine learning and professional growth are compromised. As a result, teachers may prioritize self-preservation over meaningful self-reflection (Dehombreux, 2026).

The situation becomes more complex when a teacher's pedagogical weaknesses are widely recognized within the school community, rather than solely identified by administrators. In these cases, the skill gap is evident, yet traditional evaluative observations may intensify the issue rather than resolve it (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018). The teacher under observation may experience shame, embarrassment, or isolation, while colleagues and administrators may struggle to provide candid feedback without risking professional relationships. As a result, students may continue to receive suboptimal instruction, hindering their academic progress.

### **Limitations of Conventional Approaches**

Traditional evaluative observation systems are intended to ensure teaching quality and accountability; however, evidence suggests they often yield inconsistent outcomes. Research across various educational contexts demonstrates that judgmental observations encourage teachers to focus on performance-based evaluation rather than on authentic instruction (O'Leary & Savage, 2020). As a result, observed lessons may not accurately reflect typical instructional practices and are often modified to meet evaluation criteria. This performative approach undermines the validity of observational data and limits teachers' opportunities to receive meaningful feedback on real pedagogical challenges.

The professional development literature highlights a widespread culture of fear associated with traditional supervision models. Unissa and Alhasan (2024) report that teachers' perceptions of classroom observation are influenced by its intended purpose; evaluative observations often induce anxiety, foster negative attitudes, and lead to resistance to feedback. When teachers believe that observations are intended to identify deficiencies for employment or promotion decisions, they are more likely to engage in image management rather than pursue genuine professional growth.

Evaluative observation systems often neglect the relational and psychological factors critical to professional growth. Trust is essential for effective teacher development; however, conventional models often undermine it by positioning evaluators as judges rather than as collaborative partners, as noted by Dehombreux (2026). These systems may also hinder pedagogical advancement and contribute to greater professional isolation and stigmatization, especially when differences in teaching skills are identified.

The structural design of traditional observation systems limits their overall effectiveness. Observation, feedback, and reflection are essential elements of professional learning; however, evaluative systems often reduce these processes to checklists and ratings, which fail to capture the complexity of teaching (Ponticell et al., 2019). When feedback is primarily evaluative rather than reflective, opportunities for meaningful insight and self-directed professional development are reduced.

### **Article Objectives**

This article introduces a comprehensive system for non-evaluative classroom observation designed to support teachers' professional development in environments where multiple stakeholders acknowledge diverse teaching competencies. The framework is based on the principle that meaningful improvement is achieved when educators identify their challenges and receive respectful, developmental support, rather than relying on punitive evaluations or avoiding critical discussions.

The non-evaluative observation method outlined here differs from traditional supervision in both purpose and process. It offers teachers with identified developmental needs a structured, reflective analysis of their practice in collaboration with an experienced teacher or trained observer, such as a teacher coach, with an emphasis on growth rather than accountability (Tobiason, 2024). In this framework, observation functions as a professional development tool, enabling teachers to assume responsibility for desired changes and actively interpret observational data (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018).

A central feature of the framework is its flexibility in selecting observers. While peer observation by a more experienced teacher is advantageous, other options include instructional coaches, counselors, subject-area specialists, or trained educational professionals with expertise in non-evaluative observation (Macabuhay, 2026).

This inclusive approach acknowledges that valuable feedback and support can originate from various members of the school community, including non-teaching professionals who offer unique perspectives.

The framework is applicable across a range of educational contexts, including K–12 schools, post-secondary institutions, and ESL or EFL programs. Its core elements—establishing institutional trust, emphasizing formative processes, fostering reflective dialogue, and maintaining professional dignity—remain consistent across these settings (Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2025). Empirical evidence indicates that non-evaluative observation methods have been successfully implemented in several countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Greece (Sarfraz, 2019; Sider, 2019; Alghamdi et al., 2023; Poulou et al., 2022).

The approach presented in this article addresses a notable gap in the professional development literature and practice. While existing research explores teacher assessment systems and peer collaboration, there is limited guidance for educators and administrators supporting teachers whose pedagogical deficits are apparent to the school community. Addressing this challenge requires an evaluation method that accurately identifies developmental needs while preserving professional dignity (Dehombreux, 2026).

For educational institutions, this approach offers a practical alternative to ignoring ineffective teaching or implementing costly, punitive assessment procedures that may harm professional relationships and organizational culture. By differentiating professional development observation from formal evaluation, institutions enable teachers to accurately identify areas for growth and engage in collegial support for improvement (O'Leary & Savage, 2020).

## **LIMITATIONS OF EVALUATIVE OBSERVATION**

### **The Performative Trap in Teaching Observations**

Conventional evaluative observation systems frequently transform teaching into a staged performance. When observations are linked to assessment and influence professional status or job security, teachers often modify their instruction to align with observers' expectations rather than maintain their typical teaching style (O'Leary & Savage, 2020). This transition from authentic to performative teaching diminishes the effectiveness of observation as a means for understanding and enhancing genuine classroom practice.

O'Leary and Savage (2020) differentiate between performative and informative approaches to observation. The performative approach emphasizes meeting standardized criteria and producing documentation for accountability, whereas the informative approach seeks to understand teaching and learning processes and support professional development. In performative observations, teachers frequently prepare special lessons, arrange displays, and employ teaching methods that diverge from their regular practice. While these observations may fulfill administrative requirements, they offer limited insight into teachers' genuine developmental needs or students' authentic learning experiences.

Evaluative observation frequently fails to address specific skill gaps. For example, a teacher experiencing challenges with classroom management, instructional clarity, or student engagement may deliver an exceptional observed lesson by relying on extensive preparation and uncharacteristic methods. Consequently, the observation does not address the underlying pedagogical issues that initiated the process (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018). Feedback tends to focus on observed performance rather than the substance of the lesson, leaving fundamental skill gaps unaddressed.

### **The Dignity Crisis: Public Awareness and Its Impact**

When a teacher's pedagogical skills are questioned by both administrators and the broader educational community, the psychological and relational dynamics of observation become increasingly complex. In such circumstances, evaluative observations may be perceived as professional humiliation rather than as opportunities for growth. Students and colleagues are often aware of the teacher's difficulties, and the teacher is conscious of both personal weaknesses and others' perceptions. Evaluations conducted in this context can intensify feelings

of shame and defensiveness, increase institutional pressure, and frequently fail to support professional development (Dehombreux, 2026).

Dignity represents both a personal and institutional concern for teachers. When evaluative observations emphasize judgment rather than support, teachers may be reluctant to disclose pedagogical challenges or seek assistance for fear of losing credibility. Consequently, observation may be perceived as a negative experience, leading to missed opportunities for professional development.

The student perspective is central to the dignity crisis. Students are often acutely aware of their teacher's abilities and of how the school addresses concerns about teaching quality. When a teacher is subjected to punitive or humiliating evaluations, students may lose respect for both the teacher and the institution. In contrast, when students observe teachers participating in professional learning with institutional support, the teacher's credibility and standing are enhanced. Thus, the approach to observation influences not only teacher development but also classroom dynamics and student-teacher relationships.

### **The False Politeness Concern**

When evaluative observations lead to a dignity crisis, institutions often respond with superficial politeness, offering feedback that appears supportive but lacks the specificity and honesty necessary for meaningful improvement. Observers tend to avoid addressing clear shortcomings, instead providing vague praise, ambiguous suggestions, or diplomatic feedback that fails to directly address teachers' deficits (Galvin, 2022).

Galvin's (2022) study found that elementary school administrators frequently struggled to balance supportive feedback with explicit, critical commentary on instructional practices. Feedback generally emphasized positive aspects while overlooking or minimizing the pedagogical issues that prompted the observation. While this approach may provide short-term reassurance, it ultimately undermines professional development by leaving teachers uncertain about the necessary changes.

The widespread use of superficial politeness in evaluative observation systems is particularly concerning because it creates the illusion of professional development without enabling meaningful progress. Even when all procedural steps are followed, teachers' practices often remain unchanged because the feedback is too vague, diplomatic, or irrelevant to provide actionable insight (Ponticell et al., 2019).

Unissa and Alhasan (2024) found that educators require specific, concrete feedback to support ongoing professional development. However, their research identified significant discrepancies between the feedback teachers seek and what is actually provided during formal observations. Teachers frequently received general or superficial feedback, which was particularly inadequate for those needing targeted developmental support.

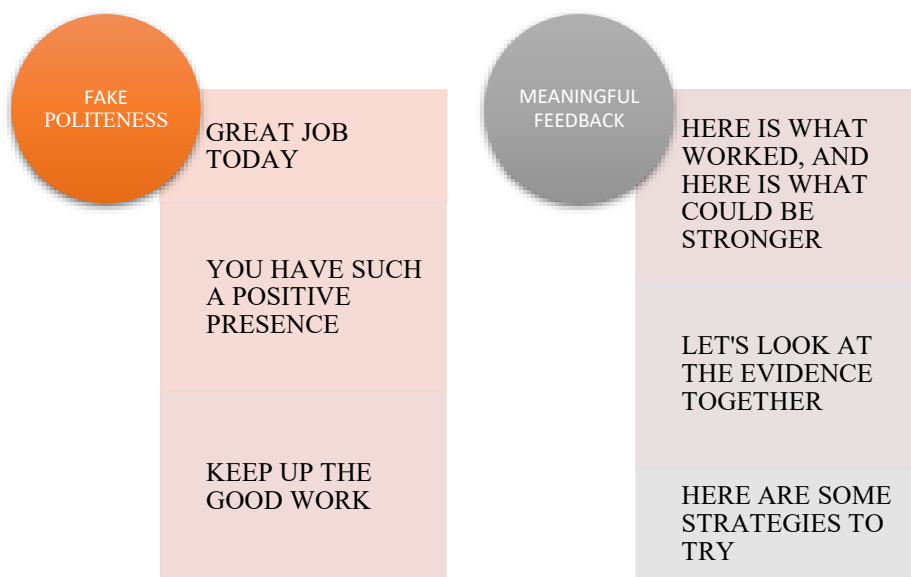
Observers face a dilemma in evaluative settings due to the tension between maintaining positive relationships and providing honest, constructive feedback. Balancing respect for teachers' dignity with the responsibility to deliver accurate evaluations and guidance is often challenging. Without a model that separates relationship-building from assessment, observers often default to politeness over honesty, thereby reducing developmental impact (Dehombreux, 2026).

Observations take place within broader structural and cultural contexts that shape their purpose and outcomes. External pressures from accrediting bodies, government agencies, or institutional leaders who emphasize evidence of teaching quality tend to prioritize accountability over teacher development (Gunn, 2018). As a result, institutions have shifted from formative to evaluative observation approaches to meet external requirements or inform employment decisions.

Gunn (2018) examines the conflicts between quality measurement systems for teaching and authentic teaching development in the United Kingdom, particularly regarding the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Observation processes designed for accountability are inherently evaluative and judgmental, which alters the nature of interactions and can generate performative, dignity-threatening dynamics, as previously discussed.

Trust is essential for observation-based professional learning across diverse educational settings and cultures (Sarfraz, 2019; Sider, 2019; Alghamdi et al., 2023). However, evaluative observation systems often undermine trust by making the process feel threatening rather than supportive. When teachers do not believe that observers have their best interests in mind, or fear negative consequences for acknowledging difficulties, they are unlikely to reflect honestly or improve their teaching practice.

Sarfraz (2019) found that building trust among ESL lecturers in Pakistan was essential for successful formative observation, as it enabled teachers to acknowledge difficulties and seek targeted feedback. Without trust, interactions remained superficial and defensive, thereby limiting professional growth. Similarly, Alghamdi et al. (2023) reported that reluctance toward peer observation in Saudi EFL classrooms stemmed from concerns about trust and professional culture, with teachers expressing discomfort about being observed or having their shortcomings discussed.



**Figure 1: Approaching Feedback**

## A Conceptual Foundation For Non-Evaluative Observation

### Writing the Non-Evaluative Observation

Non-evaluative classroom observation is distinct from evaluative observation because it prioritizes formative, collaborative support over accountability or performance management. Instead of assessing teachers against standards or imposing consequences, this approach fosters teacher development and self-directed growth through reflection and learning (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018).

Mueller and Schroeder (2018) examined how non-evaluative classroom observations influence teachers' openness to feedback, adoption of new strategies, and engagement in reflective practice. Their findings suggest that presenting observation as “formative” rather than “evaluative” encourages constructive engagement with feedback and supports instructional improvement. The study further demonstrated that eliminating assessment stakes alters teachers' perceptions, allowing them to regard observation as a resource for professional learning rather than a threat to their professionalism.

### Theoretical Foundations

Non-evaluative observation is informed by multiple theoretical frameworks in the professional development literature, including formative supervision, cognitive coaching, reflective practice, and constructive alignment. These frameworks assert that professional learning is an ongoing process and that pedagogical expertise develops under specific conditions.

O'Leary and Savage (2020) delineate a theoretical distinction between performative and informative forms of observation of teaching and learning (OTL) in higher education. Performative observation emphasizes measurement, standardization, compliance, and documentation for accountability, which reduces teaching to observable behaviors evaluated against predetermined criteria. This approach limits the development of professional judgment. Conversely, informative observation seeks to understand the complexity of teaching, supports teacher reflection and inquiry, and generates insights for ongoing professional development. The shift from performative to informative observation represents a fundamental change in both the purpose and nature of classroom observation.

Wade's (2024) study further connects non-evaluative observation methods to educator identity and collaborative practice. The findings suggest that when observation prioritizes reflection and teacher agency over judgment and external mandates, teachers not only adapt their instructional practices but also undergo changes in professional identity and collaboration. Such developmental outcomes are unlikely to result from evaluative observation systems.

### **The Role of Trust and Psychological Safety**

The current approach to institutional trust builds upon the previously discussed significance and manifests through pre-observation arrangements, confidentiality, and collaborative reflection.

Although psychological safety is not always explicitly addressed in observation literature, it is fundamental to effective non-evaluative observation. Psychological safety exists when individuals feel secure taking interpersonal risks, such as making mistakes, admitting uncertainty, or experimenting with new approaches, without fear of negative consequences for their careers or relationships. Within classroom observations, psychological safety allows teachers to share challenges, discuss pedagogical issues, and explore alternative methods without concern that such openness will be used against them (Sarfraz, 2019).

Sarfraz (2019) found that psychological safety was essential for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to gain meaningful benefits from observation and engage in substantive professional learning, rather than simply complying with institutional requirements. Lecturers were open to observation and willing to implement pedagogical changes when they trusted their colleagues' intentions and were assured that peer observation would not affect performance appraisals. Without trust and psychological safety, observation led to defensive interactions and limited professional growth.

When a teacher's pedagogical shortcomings are evident to administrators, colleagues, and students, establishing trust and psychological safety becomes more difficult. In these situations, teachers must confront the reality that their weaknesses are known, and requesting formal observation may be perceived as an admission of failure. Supporting these teachers within a non-evaluative observation process requires understanding group dynamics, maintaining a clear distinction between observation and evaluation, and implementing actions that prioritize teacher development over assessment (Unissa & Alhasan, 2024).

Sider (2019) investigated peer coaching in a school in Cairo and found that building trust is the essential first step toward successful peer observation and coaching. Sider emphasized that establishing trust and rapport, clarifying the non-evaluative nature of coaching, and ensuring confidentiality and separation from administrative appraisals are all necessary foundational elements. Without trust, peer coaching programs face significant resistance and achieve limited developmental outcomes.

### **Comparison of Non-Evaluative and Evaluative Observation**

Evaluative observation supports accounting, quality assurance, and performance management by providing data for summative judgments about teaching quality and employment decisions. In contrast, non-evaluative observation prioritizes professional development and learning, offering feedback that facilitates teachers' growth without affecting job status or professional standing (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018; O'Leary & Savage, 2020).

In evaluative observation, the observer holds institutional authority and may issue recommendations that affect the teacher's professional status. In non-evaluative observation, the observer acts as a supportive partner, while the teacher maintains autonomy in setting and pursuing developmental objectives (Dehombreux, 2026).

*Psychological Conditions:* Evaluative observation often leads to anxiety, defensiveness, and self-protective behaviors because teachers may perceive it as a threat of negative evaluation. In contrast, non-evaluative observation, when supported by trust and psychological safety, encourages openness and honest self-reflection, allowing teachers to address challenges in their practice (Unissa & Alhasan, 2024).

*Observation Focus:* Evaluative observation measures teaching performance against external competency frameworks or established standards. In contrast, non-evaluative observation allows teachers to identify targeted areas for growth and pursue individualized professional development trajectories (Tobiason, 2024).

*Data Collection and Analysis:* Evaluative observation employs standardized instruments, checklists, and rating scales to ensure consistency across teachers and contexts. Conversely, non-evaluative observation uses flexible, descriptive methods, with data interpretation conducted collaboratively by the observer and the teacher (Noben et al., 2022).

*Feedback Processes:* Evaluative observation provides judgments, ratings, and prescriptive feedback from the observer. In contrast, non-evaluative observation emphasizes reflective questioning to facilitate teacher self-assessment.

**Table 1: Comparative Framework of Evaluative and Non-Evaluative Observation**

| Dimension              | Evaluative Observation                                                               | Non-Evaluative Observation                                                                       |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Primary Purpose        | Accountability, performance management, quality assurance (Gunn, 2018)               | Professional learning, reflective development, pedagogical growth (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018)    |
| Power Dynamics         | Hierarchical; observer judges the observed teacher's performance (Dehombreux, 2026)  | Collegial; observer supports teacher's self-directed learning (O'Leary & Savage, 2020)           |
| Psychological Response | Anxiety, defensiveness, self-protective behaviors (Unissa & Alhasan, 2024)           | Openness, honest self-examination, willingness to explore challenges (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018) |
| Observation Focus      | Externally imposed standards and competency frameworks (Fernández & Martínez, 2022)  | Teacher-identified developmental goals and specific pedagogical dimensions (Tobiason, 2024)      |
| Data Collection        | Standardized checklists, rating scales, numerical scores (Noben et al., 2022)        | Descriptive documentation, focused narrative observation (Alsaied, 2018)                         |
| Feedback Process       | Evaluative judgments, ratings, prescriptive recommendations (Ponticell et al., 2019) | Reflective questions, collaborative dialogue, teacher self-assessment (Galvin, 2022)             |

|                                 |                                                                                       |                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Teacher Agency                  | Low; the teacher receives external judgment and directives                            | High; teacher interprets data and determines action steps (Entwistle & Rees-Davies, 2026)                |
| Typical Outcome                 | Performative compliance, temporary behavioral change (O'Leary & Savage, 2020)         | Authentic pedagogical growth, enhanced self-efficacy, sustained improvement (Wade, 2024)                 |
| Impact on Professional Identity | Diminished confidence, shame, withdrawal from collegial engagement (Dehombreux, 2026) | Strengthened professional identity, increased self-efficacy, growth orientation (Hohensee & Lewis, 2019) |

## The Non-Evaluative Observation Framework: Structure, Participants, and Outcomes

### The Three-Phase Framework

Non-evaluative classroom observation consists of three interconnected phases that differ from traditional evaluative methods. In the pre-observation phase, teachers set developmental goals, establish relational agreements with observers, and promote psychological safety (Dehombreux, 2026). Instead of administrators dictating the focus of observation, teachers choose specific pedagogical elements to observe, such as questioning strategies, lesson pacing, or student engagement. This approach maintains a developmental rather than evaluative orientation (Tobiason, 2024).

During the observation phase, the observer acts as a reflective participant rather than a judge. Observations are documented descriptively, focusing on the teacher's identified developmental goals rather than on standard evaluation rubrics (Noben et al., 2022). This non-judgmental method reduces performance anxiety and enables the observation of authentic teaching.

In the post-observation stage, observations are transformed into professional learning through reflective dialogue instead of evaluative feedback.

### Who Can Observe? - Extending the Role

Non-evaluative observation extends beyond peer teachers. Instructional coaches, counselors, clinical supervisors, and department coordinators can also serve as effective observers if they possess strong facilitative and relational skills (Macabuhay, 2026). Observer effectiveness relies more on coaching competencies, such as active listening, reflective questioning, and fostering psychological safety, than on general teaching expertise (Entwistle & Rees-Davies, 2026). Expanding the observer role enhances institutional support for teacher development and highlights the importance of diverse professional relationships in acquiring pedagogical insight (Kustamaji & Abdurrahman, 2026).

Reciprocal peer observation models provide multiple advantages. A systematic review by Corcelles-Seuba et al. (2025) demonstrated that two-way observation benefits both participants, regardless of competency differences, and significantly reduces the stigma associated with being perceived as the "weaker" teacher.

### Outcomes: Authentic Growth and Professional Identity

Non-evaluative observation produces higher-quality outcomes than evaluative approaches. Teachers who primarily participated in non-evaluative observation demonstrated sustained improvements in instructional practice, deeper reflective processes, and greater pedagogical experimentation (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018). In contrast, evaluative observation generally leads to short-term compliance rather than genuine understanding.

In addition to instructional benefits, non-evaluative observation enhances teachers' self-efficacy and professional identity, especially among those who recognize their developmental needs. Entwistle and Rees-Davies (2026) reported that observation-based cognitive coaching significantly increased teachers' confidence and sense of agency. Wade (2024) noted that non-evaluative observation supports a shift from a defensive to a growth mindset. For teachers whose practices are visible to peers and students, this transformation in professional identity can be as influential as changes in instructional methods (Hohensee & Lewis, 2019). Furthermore, Wilkinson et al. (2020) argue that authentic pedagogical change, as evidenced by improved student learning, engagement, and experience, constitutes the most meaningful indicator of effective teacher development.

### **Practical Considerations, Conceptual Limitations, and Future Directions**

Building upon the expanding literature on formative supervision, cognitive coaching, reflective practice, and peer observation, the proposed non-evaluative observation framework should be viewed as a conceptual model rather than a universal solution. This framework synthesizes findings from diverse learning environments to support a coherent developmental process. Its effectiveness, however, depends on institutional conditions, which can vary significantly across educational systems. Recognizing these contextual factors helps to delineate the framework's boundaries and identify the circumstances under which it can most effectively enhance professional learning.

Institutional preparedness is a critical consideration. The framework assumes that schools can distinguish between professional development and formal assessment. In practice, however, many educational systems closely link classroom observation with accountability, promotion, contract renewal, and quality assurance (Gunn, 2018). Such institutional expectations may render fully non-evaluative observation processes less feasible, as administrators often require evidence to support personnel decisions. O'Leary and Savage (2020) similarly note that increased accountability has resulted in more performative observation practices, prioritizing institutional compliance over professional learning. Therefore, organizational structures must be committed to preserving the developmental purpose of classroom observation to ensure successful implementation of the proposed framework.

Another limitation involves the training of observers. The effectiveness of the framework depends not only on teachers' openness but also on observers' competencies. Observers may include peer teachers, instructional coaches, counselors, department coordinators, or other trained educational personnel. However, simply assigning these roles does not ensure effective facilitation. Essential observer skills include reflective questioning, active listening, evidence-based feedback, confidentiality, and relationship building (Ponticell et al., 2019; Galvin, 2022; Entwistle & Rees-Davies, 2026). Without sufficient training, observers may unintentionally adopt evaluative practices that undermine the framework's developmental purpose and compromise psychological safety and trust.

The framework presupposes the availability of institutional resources, which may not be present in all educational contexts. Effective non-evaluative observation requires pre-observation conferences, classroom visits, reflection time, and follow-up support. Schools that are understaffed, have high student-teacher ratios, or possess limited professional development budgets may encounter significant implementation challenges. Similarly, institutions lacking trained instructional coaches or experienced mentors may struggle to adopt the framework. While reciprocal peer observation can help reduce resource demands (Corcelles-Seuba et al., 2025), ongoing professional learning should be recognized as an organizational investment rather than a series of isolated observation events.

Scalability represents an additional conceptual consideration. Although formative observation has demonstrated effectiveness in K–12 education, higher education, and English language teaching (Sarfraz, 2019; Sider, 2019; Alghamdi et al., 2023; Tobiasson, 2024), factors such as institutional culture, administrative structures, and national educational policies can influence implementation. In contexts characterized by hierarchical leadership or heightened accountability, the framework may require gradual adaptation rather than immediate adoption. Consequently, the framework should be regarded as sufficiently flexible to accommodate contextual differences while maintaining its core principles of trust, teacher agency, reflective dialogue, and psychological safety.

The literature also acknowledges the necessity of evaluative observation for educational quality assurance. Evaluative systems provide institutions with essential information for accreditation, accountability, and personnel management, functions that formative observation cannot fully replace (Gunn, 2018; Fernández & Martínez, 2022). The present framework conceptualizes evaluative and non-evaluative observation as distinct practices suited to different institutional needs. Non-evaluative observation is most appropriate for authentic professional learning, pedagogical experimentation, and sustained instructional improvement, whereas evaluative observation is better suited for employment decisions, quality assurance, and professional accountability (Mueller & Schroeder, 2018; O'Leary & Savage, 2020). Ideally, these complementary functions should be intentionally separated to reduce teacher anxiety and ensure appropriate accountability structures.

The conceptual analysis presented in this paper highlights several priorities for future research. Although numerous empirical studies have validated individual components of the proposed framework, such as trust and aspects of the integrated non-evaluative observation model, few studies have examined the combined impact across diverse educational contexts. Future research should include longitudinal case studies, school-wide implementation analyses, and comparative investigations across different educational settings. Relevant areas of inquiry include teacher self-efficacy, instructional practices, professional identity, and student learning outcomes, as well as organizational conditions that facilitate or impede effective implementation. A comprehensive organizational conditions framework would yield stronger evidence of its effectiveness and inform further refinement for broader application.

## CONCLUSION

A persistent challenge in teacher professional development is that observation systems are often limited to accountability, which restricts opportunities for meaningful instructional improvement. This article presents a conceptual model for non-evaluative classroom observation that reframes it as a collaborative, formative process grounded in trust, reflective practice, psychological safety, and teacher agency. The proposed framework synthesizes established concepts and practices from the literature in K–12, higher education, and English language learning, integrating formative supervision, cognitive coaching, and peer observation into a three-phase process: pre-observation preparation, formative classroom observation, and post-observation reflective dialogue.

The proposed framework is intended to complement existing evaluative observation systems. Non-evaluative observation serves a distinct purpose: it fosters reflective practice, professional learning, and ongoing pedagogical development. By clearly separating evaluative and non-evaluative functions, educational institutions can address instructional challenges while preserving professional integrity and promoting a culture of continuous improvement.

The framework acknowledges the importance of institutional conditions for successful implementation. Building trust, preparing skilled observers with sufficient time and professional development resources, and adapting the framework to diverse educational contexts are essential for its effectiveness. While non-evaluative observation is not a universal solution, it represents a developmental strategy that can be effective when implemented thoughtfully and supported by the organization.

This article is conceptual and synthesizes existing empirical literature to develop an integrated framework, rather than presenting original field research. Further investigation is required through longitudinal studies, institutional case studies, and comparative research with other educational systems to evaluate the framework's effectiveness and examine the contextual factors that influence its implementation. Such research would contribute to the empirical foundation of non-evaluative observation and enhance its application across diverse classroom settings.

In conclusion, meaningful improvements in teaching are most likely when classroom observation is regarded primarily as a tool for professional learning rather than solely as an evaluative instrument. The proposed framework emphasizes collaboration, reflective dialogue, and evidence-based teacher learning, offering a practical model to support teacher development and advance the broader goals of instructional improvement and student achievement.

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