

<https://doi.org/10.46991/FLHE.2025.29.1.101>

## CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON PEER OBSERVATION IN TEACHING

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**Abstract:** *In contemporary education, the need for teachers to enhance their practices and core knowledge in pedagogy is significant. Various professional development programs have been devised to address the teacher's needs, nonetheless, since many of them are generic, they often fail to consider individual circumstances, situational aspects and in some cases factors related to national mentality. Here, Peer Observation of Teachers (POT) can be instrumental and a promising method in identifying and refining a teacher's overall approach to teaching methods. This aligns with teachers' motivations for growth and provides relevant, actionable feedback. The current study evaluates POT's effectiveness as a professional development tool using qualitative methods, including Focus Group Discussions and surveys across various disciplines, such as English, Business Management, and Linguistics. In Armenian higher education, where formal peer observation is still developing, hierarchical structures and a limited feedback culture may affect its implementation. The paper reveals that POT helps identify areas for improvement, promoting reflective practice which can enhance and facilitate the practice of knowledge sharing and contribute to a supportive working community. The study also touches upon significant challenges, such as time constraints, stress and subjective feedback. In addition, the lack of formalised peer observation programs may lead to inconsistent practices. The study recommends increasing the frequency of peer observation sessions and developing programs with clear guidelines to provide targeted training for teachers and boost*

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Received: 28/04/2025

Revised: 23/05/2025

Accepted: 29/05/2025

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*effectiveness. Overall, POT is valued for its potential to improve teaching quality and professional development provided there is structured institutional support.*

**Keywords:** *Peer Observation of Teachers, professional development, teacher feedback, classroom observation, teaching methods, educational improvement, teacher training*

## **Introduction**

Teaching is a continuous process of learning, which requires teachers not only to stay updated with the latest trends, innovations, and theoretical practices but also to master practical approaches. Irrespective of their best efforts, teachers often find it difficult to demonstrate an unbiased and objective evaluation and assessment of their teaching methods, which is essential not only for their career but also for the quality of teaching and the product that they provide. To foster the overall teaching process, universities, colleges, and schools often provide mandatory refresher courses, and teachers themselves participate in workshops, seminars, and discussions during which they share concerns and exchange experiences, which is invaluable for the teaching process. However, POT may be singled out as one of the most effective tools for teacher development. While teachers' training courses, programs, and seminars are of a generalised character, POT offers an individualised and unique approach tailored for the teacher based on the observation, allowing them to receive specific feedback on their teaching styles. This individualised feedback helps to reveal their potential, ultimately resulting in significant refinements in their pedagogical skills. As a result, the integration of POT into professional development strategies is imperative for the overall betterment of the educational system, ensuring the teacher's professional growth.

The purpose of this paper is to show the best possibilities that POT may offer for teacher development. It aims to underscore the significant benefits of POT, such as fostering teaching practices and creating a collaborative learning environment among educators. Additionally, this paper will touch upon potential threats and biases that can be encountered in the POT process, including power dynamics, subjective evaluations, and the biased influence of personal relationships. Furthermore, it will examine the reasons why many teachers are reluctant to be observed and avoid the process due to concerns about privacy and the fear of judgment considering that it may impact their professional reputation.

The paper also provides observations from a survey conducted primarily in educational institutions in Armenia, as well as in foreign institutions, offering a comparative perspective. It presents different approaches to conducting POT, along with practical solutions to the challenges that both teachers and observers may encounter in the process. Through these insights, the paper aims to provide a

comprehensive understanding of POT's role in advancing educational quality and supporting teachers in reaching their full potential.

### **Theoretical Background**

Peer observation of teaching was first proposed in the early 1980s in the USA as an on-site dimension of staff development (Hossain, 2021). Peer observation is defined as a process which ‘involves a university lecturer attending a colleague’s teaching session with the intention of offering feedback as a ‘critical friend’ (Lomas & Kinchin, 2006, p. 204). Gosling categorises peer observation into three models: evaluative, developmental, and collaborative (Gosling, 2002). The evaluative model, which is formative in nature, aims to assure quality and high standards in teaching, serving managerial purposes, while the developmental and collaborative models are less formal and promote skill enhancement and reflection through peer interaction. According to Goldhammer, peer observation aims to improve classroom instruction and is realised either as part of a mentoring program or on an individual level (Goldhammer, 2015). While some skills are directly observable, others are better addressed through discussions, contributing to the exploration of new teaching strategies.

As the discourse on peer observation continues to evolve, recent studies have brought renewed attention to the pivotal role of feedback in improving teaching practices. For instance, a large-scale meta-analysis highlights that feedback can significantly enhance both instructional quality and student outcomes (Wisniewski, Zierer, & Hattie, 2020). This reinforces the value of peer observation not only as an evaluative measure but as a channel for professional dialogue and growth. Furthermore, peer feedback is increasingly recognized as a low-cost yet highly effective approach to teacher development. A recent systematic review emphasizes that collaborative feedback among educators, when thoughtfully integrated, can strengthen professional learning communities and encourage sustained pedagogical reflection (de la Iglesia, Forteza, & Duma, 2024). These insights further affirm the potential of peer observation as a practical and reflective tool within institutional settings.

### **Why POT?**

Teaching faces significant internal and external pressures and thus requires ongoing adaptation and improvement to improve teachers' practices, mindsets, and student outcomes. However, Guskey warns that such programs may fall short if they overlook teachers' motivational incentives and the process by which this

change typically happens (Guskey, 2002). By focusing on practical and job-relevant issues, teachers broaden their expertise, enhancing both individual and institutional practices.

Peer observation is highly effective as it is directly related to teachers' intrinsic motivations and supports natural changes in their professional behaviour, providing relevant and timely feedback that can be immediately applied. When teachers see obvious benefits to their knowledge, skills, and classroom performance, they get more engaged in the process, which contributes to professional growth. Another advantageous feature of peer observation is that it adapts professional development to individual teachers' needs and given contexts. By observing and being observed in their classrooms, educators receive practical insights directly relevant to the challenges they encounter and their goals, increasing the possibility of adopting and honing new practices and achieving lasting improvements and solid knowledge.

POT contributes to well-rounded professional development by enabling teachers from different disciplines to observe each other and exchange their best practices since the concept of peer observation in teaching goes beyond the scope of a classroom lesson and thus forges multidisciplinary collaboration. This exchange provides educators with new perspectives, simultaneously refining their teaching methods and cultivating a culture of continuous learning. The incorporation of peer observation into professional development programs in institutions, along with a cross-disciplinary collaborative approach, can establish a dynamic and adaptable environment which will promote sustained improvement in teaching and boost student outcomes.

As Kemp and Gosling state POT serves two distinct purposes: as a developmental means of enhancing the quality of teaching and as a means of evaluating the quality of teaching' (Kemp & Gosling, 2000). Observing experienced colleagues contributes to early-career educators in learning diverse teaching methods improving student engagement and accelerating their professional growth. By making use of this practice higher education institutions will enhance student experiences, promote faculty collaboration, and reduce training costs. The benefits are mutual: while early-career teachers gain exposure to varied teaching styles, seasoned educators also benefit by gaining fresh insights and identifying areas for improvement.

### **Advantages**

The culture of educational institutions prioritises teaching and learning initiatives. Peer observation of teaching in schools and higher education offers multiple

advantages in addition to being an effective developmental tool and a powerful mechanism for professional development. It stimulates critical reflection on teaching methods on both individual and institutional levels. POT is a means to boost pedagogical skills and ensure a culture of shared learning and collaboration. The overall process can be advantageous, resulting in a strengthened professional network based on mutual trust and respect. POT is a chance for fresh perspectives, innovative strategies, and efficient curriculum development. Teachers can identify areas for improvement not only when being observed but also when observing, contributing to their professional growth.

On a constructive and practical level for institutional management, the benefits of POT can fall into several key strategic advantages:

*observation frequency* – POT can be conducted more frequently since it requires minimum management involvement and allows teachers to improve between more formal evaluations;

*less time-consuming* – POT saves management time allowing them to focus on other urgent issues;

*supporting career advancement* – POT offers low pressure in gaining experience through observation and feedback;

*open to feedback* – POT allows teachers to be more receptive to confidential feedback enhancing the effectiveness of the process;

*diverse feedback* – POT allows observers to pair with teachers of different focus areas to provide varied perspectives;

*mutual learning* – POT allows both parties to benefit through encouraging self-reflection;

*ongoing professional development* – POT can be carried out independently as required.

POT is described as an approach that cultivates dialogue, a sense of community, and reflective practice among teachers through informal yet intentional peer observation. They emphasise how this process provides valuable insights, stimulates critical thinking, and reinforces lifelong learning. The active engagement of colleague-teachers in mutual knowledge exchange establishes a culture of constructive feedback, encourages self-assessment, and affirms professional expertise, enabling teachers to identify strengths and areas for development. Watching peers teach directly builds confidence and inspires educators to refine their methods and develop new instructional strategies (Cassada, Harris, et al., 2017, p. 79).

## **Challenges and Solutions**

Peer observation in teaching can be a valuable tool for professional growth, but several challenges need addressing to maximise its potential. Specific drawbacks of peer observation have been revealed during surveys by some researchers who claim that while peer observers are comfortable providing constructive feedback, they are less willing and confident in critical reflection although it is essential in the observation process and contributes to enhancing the teaching and pedagogical practice overall (Kohut et al., 2007; Gosling, 2009).

The lack of disciplinary pedagogy skills among observers is another challenge which may often result in less relevant feedback. Consequently, training that deepens understanding of subject-specific teaching methods can help make observations more insightful. This can be realised by providing training aimed at boosting observers' confidence and, at the same time offering balanced and actionable feedback. Subjectivity and bias can appear as additional obstacles in providing feedback, especially when there is a personal connection between the observer and the observed. Clear observation forms and training on recognizing biases can ensure more objective feedback.

To mitigate psychological outcomes, such as insecurity or complacency, which can arise from peer observation, it is recommended to foster a collaborative culture focused on mutual improvement rather than competition. Another issue is time constraints since peer observation requires significant preparation and feedback time, including scheduling specific time for observations and integrating them into professional development days.

The efficiency of observation outcomes is ensured by orderly, organised training, which mandatorily includes the design of feedback forms, workshops. Objective data collection should be part of the training to help teachers observe and provide constructive feedback. Teachers need time to familiarise themselves with the process itself, and once they have done it, they are capable of taking on more responsibility, with oversight remaining for unimpeded implementation.

By addressing these challenges with targeted solutions, peer observation can become an enriching and effective tool for continuous professional development.

## **Organizing Peer Observations**

It is vital to establish a clear framework before conducting a classroom observation through a preliminary meeting between the peer observers and the faculty member. The primary goal is to clarify the purpose and desired outcomes of the observation and to allow the faculty members to share what they hope to gain. The meetings

serve as the foundation for efficient mentoring and, consequently, constructive feedback, allowing the observer to gather essential information about the course. The information necessary to organise the observation includes class structure, student demographics, teaching methods and strategies the faculty member wants to focus on, and specific areas they may want feedback on, such as engagement techniques, use of technology, or class activities.

A full-session observation provides the most comprehensive perspective, yet it may not always be feasible due to time or resource constraints. In such cases, preliminary discussions allow the instructor to voice specific teaching challenges and project expectations. The observer can then focus on selected aspects of the session, such as instructional strategies, classroom transitions, student engagement, and the overall organization of the lesson.

A crucial part of the pre-observation process is self-reflection which encourages faculty members to critically evaluate their teaching practices, underscore strengths, identify areas where they need support, and consider any changes they may want to apply. This reflective process can feel vulnerable, but it plays an important role in professional development.

The peer observer should comprehend the course syllabus since it details important features of the learning objectives, evaluations, and teaching practices. The syllabus includes the assignments, grading guidelines, and general expectations of the faculty. The observer also gains context and insight into the faculty member's interactions with students and course organization.

To decide whether the faculty member is efficient as a teacher the following crucial areas are recommended to study throughout the observation of a peer:

*Instructional Strategies:* Examine the teaching strategies employed to see if they complement the course material and learning goals. If students work in groups, it is recommended to evaluate how effectively the instructor guides the task and whether the discussions are meaningful. Check to see if the lecturer engages students with pertinent subjects and talks clearly during a lecture.

*Promoting Critical Thinking:* Assess how the teacher fosters and encourages critical thinking and comprehension of the material and whether students delve deeper than the obvious. Note if the teacher asks follow-up questions, pushes students to think creatively, or helps them relate new concepts to earlier lessons.

*Organization and Sequencing:* The general flow and structure of the session are to be considered. In addition, it should be noted if each topic is directly related to the previous and the topics flow well into one another.

*Student Engagement:* The effectiveness of instructional strategies is frequently reflected in student engagement and to what extent the instructor promotes and

enables participation, how students engage with the subject matter and with one another and if they are conducting experiments, having conversations, or posing questions.

*Classroom Environment:* The ambience in the classroom has to be evaluated since it may or may not provide appropriate conditions for students to be involved. The teacher is the one responsible for fostering an environment where students are free to voice their thoughts, questions and opinions. Another significant aspect of the session organisation is how the teacher responds to opposing viewpoints or challenging topics.

*Technology Use:* Presently the use of technology in the classroom is an inalienable part of the successful conduct of a session. However, a mere application of the technologies is not enough to improve students' learning and engagement. It is necessary that tools are in line with the educational objectives and that the instructor feels at ease utilizing them.

It is beneficial to have a quick feedback session following the observation to talk about what went well, how the objectives of the session were achieved, and any areas that might use some tweaking. Both the observer and the faculty member gain practical insights from this conversation, which aids in the faculty member's continued professional growth. The method turns into a useful tool for development if these important areas are prioritised and clear communication is maintained before, during, and following the observation.

### **Suggested Model for Organizing Peer Observation**

#### *Pre-Observation Meeting:*

Objective: establish clear observation goals and target areas.

Activity: discuss specific aspects of teaching, agree on the observation method, and set expectations.

#### *Observation Session:*

Objective: collect data on the teaching practice.

Activity: conduct the observation following the preliminarily agreed areas and the mode, minimizing disruptions during the session.

#### *Post-Observation Reflection:*

Objective: analyze the session and provide effective feedback.

Activity: engage in a constructive dialogue starting with the teacher's self-reflection, share observations, highlight specific evidence, and discuss strategies for further improvement.



*Follow-Up Activities:*

Objective: encourage continuous support and collaboration.

Activity: schedule a follow-up meeting to monitor progress.

**PEER OBSERVATION FORM**

Observer's Name _____	Teacher's Name _____
Course Name _____	
Duration of the Session _____	
Rating <b>(1-5)</b> : <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5	
Organization and Structure of the Session	<b>(1-5)</b> : <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Teacher's Subject Knowledge	<b>(1-5)</b> : <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Teaching Methods and Techniques: Instructional Methods Applied: <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture <input type="checkbox"/> Discussions <input type="checkbox"/> Case Study <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-Solving Tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<b>(1-5)</b> : <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <b>Learning Materials</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Textbooks <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations <input type="checkbox"/> Videos <input type="checkbox"/> Online-resources <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Classroom Management	<b>(1-5)</b> : <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Technology and Online Resources	<b>(1-5)</b> : <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Students' Engagement	<b>(1-5)</b> : <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
Strongest Aspects of the Session	_____
Areas for Improvement	_____
Challenges	_____
Suggestions	_____
Signature _____	<b>Observation Date:</b> _____

## **From Insight to Action**

A small-scale study was carried out by educators from Yerevan State University (YSU) to explore current peer observation practices within higher education. The findings are intended to serve as a basis for a larger-scale investigation in the future. The study examined both the perceived advantages and difficulties of peer observation through an anonymous online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 55 faculty members from various institutions. Participants had between 2 and over 30 years of teaching experience and came from disciplines including English, Business Management, and Linguistics.

The survey gathered demographic data and explored the participants' experiences with peer observation, the level of institutional support available, the challenges they encountered, and their views on improving the process. Just over half of the respondents (53%) indicated that they had engaged in peer observation activities at some point in their careers. Among them, the experience was generally seen as useful, particularly in terms of exchanging teaching practices, receiving informed feedback, strengthening collaboration between colleagues, and identifying areas for growth in their teaching approach.

The data also indicates a number of obstacles. Time constraints were mentioned most frequently, with many respondents noting the difficulty of making space for observation activities in already packed academic schedules. This challenge appeared more acute in institutions where peer observation is informal or left to individual initiative, often without any structured guidance or administrative backing.

Another commonly cited issue was the unease associated with being observed, especially among those early in their careers. Several educators shared that the experience could be uncomfortable or anxiety-inducing, which, in turn, might influence how openly they teach or how they interpret feedback. Concerns were also raised about the potential for subjective or uneven feedback, particularly in the absence of shared criteria or observation frameworks. Only 40% of the participants reported that their institutions had formal peer observation procedures in place, while 60% felt that the practice was not sufficiently supported. This included limited access to training, lack of allocated time, and unclear procedural expectations.

Participants offered a number of suggestions for improving the practice. Many advocated for the development of clear guidelines, training sessions for both those observing and being observed, and a more consistent approach to evaluating observed lessons. Several respondents also emphasised the importance of integrating peer observation into broader faculty development efforts to encourage

wider participation and a more consistent experience. The survey results showed a notable contrast between educators' recognition of the value of peer observation and the practical limitations that affect its implementation. For example, while 53% had participated in observation, a larger portion (60%) reported insufficient support at their institutions. Moreover, many of the concerns raised by participants, such as time pressure, discomfort, and inconsistent feedback, echoed findings reported in other contexts, indicating that these challenges are shared across institutions and specific to a single setting.

While teaching is inherently personal and shaped by individual styles and disciplinary norms, this study suggests that peer observation has the potential to contribute meaningfully to professional development, especially when supported by thoughtful institutional policies, preparation, and a culture of collegial respect. The insights gathered through this preliminary research offer a starting point for more extensive studies and suggest that, with proper attention to context and support, peer observation can evolve into a constructive, collaborative process for improving teaching in higher education.

## Conclusion

The survey results indicate that peer observation is generally perceived as a beneficial tool for professional development among educators. However, the effectiveness of this practice is often hampered by challenges such as time constraints, stress, subjectivity in feedback, and a lack of formalised programs. To maximise the benefits of peer observation, institutions need to take a proactive approach by providing structured support, training, and clear guidelines.

A well-implemented peer observation program can lead to significant improvements in teaching practices, fostering a collaborative environment where educators can learn from one another and continuously refine their skills. By addressing the challenges identified in the survey, educational institutions can make peer observation a more effective and supportive element of teacher development, ultimately enhancing both teaching quality and student outcomes.

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**Ե. Երզնկյան, Ի. Բուռնազյան, Լ. Բոստանջյան – Քննադատական մոտորումներ դասապրոցեսի փոխադարձ մշտադիտարկման շուրջ.** – Ժամանակակից կրթական համակարգը պահանջում է, որ ուսուցիչները շարունակաբար զար-

զացնեն իրենց մասնագիտական հմտությունները և ժամանակակից դասավանդման մեթոդներ կիրառեն: Ուսուցիչների կարիքներին արձագանքելու համար մշակվել են մասնագիտական վերապատրաստման բազմազան ծրագրեր, սակայն դրանցից շատերն ունեն ընդհանրական բնույթ և հաճախ հաշվի չեն առնում անհատական հանգամանքներ, իրավիճակային գործոններ, ինչպես նաև, որոշ դեպքերում, ազգային մտածելակերպի առանձնահատկությունները: Այս համատեքստում գործընկերների կողմից դասապրոցեսի փոխադարձ մշտադիտարկումը (Peer Observation of Teaching - POT) կարող է արդյունավետ և համագործակցային մեթոդ հանդիսանալ միմյանց դասավանդման մոտեցումներին ծանոթանալու, շարունակ կատարելագործվելու և փորձը փոխանակելու համար՝ գործնական ու կիրառելի հետադարձ կապի ապահովման միջոցով: Սույն ուսումնասիրությունը ընդգծում է «Փոխադարձ մշտադիտարկում» մեթոդի արդյունավետությունը՝ որպես մասնագիտական զարգացմանը նպաստող գործիք: Կիրառելով ժամանակակից մեթոդներ, այդ թվում՝ ֆոկուս-խմբային քննարկումներ (Focus Group Discussions) և հարցումներ՝ հետազոտությունը փորձում է ապացուցել, որ փոխադարձ մշտադիտարկումը օգնում է բացահայտել դասավանդման բարելավման կարիքները, խթանում ուսուցման վերափնաստավորումը և նպաստում գիտելիքի փոխանակման մշակույթի զարգացմանը՝ ձևավորելով փոխօգնության վրա հիմնված աշխատանքային միջավայր: Այնուամենայնիվ, ուսումնասիրությունը նաև ընդգծում է որոշ կարևոր մարտահրավերներ, ինչպիսիք են ժամանակի սղությունը, սթրեսային գործոնները և սուբյեկտիվ արձագանքները: Բացի այդ, գործընկերային դիտարկման պաշտոնական ծրագրերի բացակայությունը կարող է հանգեցնել ոչ միատեսակ գործելակերպի: Սույն հետազոտությունն առաջարկում է վերանայել փոխադարձ մշտադիտարկման հաճախականությունը և մշակել ծրագրեր՝ հստակ ուղեցույցներով, որոնք կապահովեն ուսուցիչների նպատակային վերապատրաստումը և կբարձրացնեն դասավանդման արդյունավետությունը: Ընդհանուր առմամբ, համակարգային աջակցության առկայության դեպքում փոխադարձ մշտադիտարկումը կարող է էական դեր խաղալ դասավանդման որակի բարելավման և ուսուցիչների մասնագիտական զարգացման գործում:

**Բանալի բաներ.** ուսուցիչների փոխադարձ մշտադիտարկում, մասնագիտական զարգացում, հետադարձ կապ, դասապրոցեսի մշտադիտարկում, դասավանդման մեթոդներ, կրթության բարելավում, ուսուցիչների վերապատրաստում

**Е. Ерзинкян, И. Бурназян, Л. Бостанджян – Критические размышления о взаимном мониторинге учебного процесса.** – Современный образовательный процесс требует от учителей постоянного профессионального роста и совер-

шенствования в области методики преподавания. Многие программы повышения квалификации носят общий характер и направлены на углубление профессиональных навыков, зачастую не учитывают индивидуальные обстоятельства, ситуативные факторы и особенности национального менталитета. В данном контексте ‘коллегиальное наблюдение учителей’ (Peer Observation of Teaching – POT) может стать полезным и перспективным методом для оценивания и совершенствования общего подхода преподавателей к методам обучения, обеспечивая актуальную и конструктивную обратную связь. В данной работе рассматривается эффективность взаимного мониторинга учебного процесса как инструмента профессионального развития с использованием качественных методов, включая фокус-групповые обсуждения и опросы среди преподавателей различных дисциплин, таких как английский язык, управление бизнесом и лингвистика. Исследование выявляет существенные проблемы, связанные с мониторингом, такие как временные ограничения, стресс и субъективность обратной связи. Кроме того, отсутствие формальных программ наблюдения со стороны коллег может привести к непоследовательности процесса.

Рекомендуется увеличить частоту наблюдений со стороны коллег и разработать программы с четко выработанным руководством для обеспечения целевой подготовки учителей и повышения эффективности процесса преподавания. В целом, взаимный мониторинг направлен на улучшение качества преподавания и профессионального роста при условии наличия структурированной институциональной поддержки.

**Ключевые слова:** *взаимное наблюдение, профессиональное развитие, обратная связь, наблюдение за учебным процессом, методики преподавания, совершенствование образования, повышение квалификации преподавателей*