DOI: 10.2478/jtes-2023-0023

Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability,
vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 187–200, 2023

A More Sustainable Approach to Evaluating Teacher's Work

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Abstract

The evaluation of teacher's work has traditionally been a cornerstone of educational systems worldwide, driven by the need to maintain educational standards and ensure teacher accountability. Recognizing the limitations of conventional evaluation practices, a growing movement advocates for a more sustainable and inclusive approach that values the complex nature of teaching.
The aim of the research is to analyse ways for incorporating a more sustainable framework in the assessment of teacher's daily work.
The data of 73 observed lessons protocols allow concluding that the recorded statistical data provide only a general overview of classroom practices. Qualitative data serve as a valuable tool for gaining in-depth insights into the context of the classroom problems and the direction toward possible solutions.
The main findings of the study: prioritizing student learning and promoting their sustainable development, with an emphasis on independent learning and developing meta-cognitive skills are significant factors of our proposed approach to teacher's work evaluation, as well as taking into consideration teachers' beliefs, experience and attitudes in line with the observers' subjectivity.

Keywords: Evaluation, observation, pedagogy, sustainable, teacher, work.

Introduction

The daily work of a teacher is multifaceted and complex, requiring various professional competencies and general skills. In recent years, the performance of a teacher's daily duties has been further complicated by socio-economic changes in society, political events, and rapid technological advancements (Ogunyemi et al., 2022). Education researchers acknowledge that the education currently being implemented is not sustainable for the needs of contemporary students and society (Salīte et al., 2023).

Traditionally, assessing a teacher's daily performance has been a fundamental aspect of education systems. This practice is motivated by the imperative to uphold education quality and establish accountability among teachers. However, conventional evaluation methods often rely on rigid criteria, such as standardized testing and

classroom observations, which can inadvertently undermine teacher well-being and neglect the broader dimensions of teaching effectiveness (Meesuk et al., 2021). As the demands on teachers continue to evolve, it becomes essential to explore a more sustainable and comprehensive approach to teacher evaluation that aligns with the principles of holistic education (Pipere et al., 2015). While these evaluation mechanisms serve a purpose, they can inadvertently create a high-stress environment that fails to reflect the complex, multifaceted nature of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

Recognizing the limitations of these conventional evaluation practices, a growing movement advocates for a more sustainable and inclusive approach that values the intricacies of teaching. This shift emphasizes the importance of holistic teacher development, self-reflection, and ongoing professional growth, rather than rigid assessments and punitive measures (Niemi, 2012).

Teachers often feel like they are constantly under scrutiny: their work is controlled by state regulatory documents, the demands of educational institution administrations, parental pressure, and students' desire to achieve high results without excessive effort and within a short time frame. In this way, teachers may feel that they have no support system. In almost all major educational institutions in Latvia, there are education methodologists whose job includes providing support to teachers to enhance the quality of their work and motivation. However, the question often arises whether the work of an education methodologist does not turn into and/or is not perceived by teachers as another controlling authority that adds extra stress to a teacher's daily routine by monitoring their actions in the classroom.

The need for a more sustainable approach to teacher evaluation is underscored by the growing body of literature on the benefits of holistic education, which encompasses social and emotional learning, cultural competence, and fostering inclusive classroom environments (Durlak et al., 2011; Noddings, 2013). A sustainable teacher evaluation approach should align with these broader educational goals.

Theoretical Framework

Pedagogy refers not only to the theory and practice of education including the methods and strategies used for teaching and learning. Pedagogy encompasses a vision of society, human nature, knowledge in relation to educational goals, including an understanding of the practical and everyday means of their implementation (Davies, 1994). Here, Davies (1994) clearly formulates the subjective nature of pedagogy in connection with practice, i.e., pedagogical practice depends on (and is shaped by) individuals' perspectives, teachers' judgments of how to describe, motivate, and achieve good results in teaching/learning process, interpretations of how the knowledge gained is related to educational goals, and actions taken to achieve these goals. The subjectivity of pedagogical practice in institutional contexts is discussed by Giroux and Simon (1988) – they note that pedagogy organizes ideas about teacher's work in an institutional context, specifying a particular version of what knowledge is most valuable, the direction in which we should develop, what it means to know something, and how we can create representations of ourselves, others, and our physical and social environment.

Pedagogy allows each student to be part of a human relationship with knowledge, to access the world with intelligibility, creativity and sensitivity. There can be no rethinking of curricula and pedagogy without the presence of teachers

(UNESCO, 2021). Pedagogy is associated with the conditions under which knowledge is acquired. These conditions are largely related to teacher's beliefs, decisions, opinions, and value judgments on a wide range of issues, all of which are personal and therefore subjective. Teacher's work in educational institutions is significantly influenced by their personal beliefs (Briede, 2016).

The role of evaluation in educational institutions has become more significant over the decades, particularly emphasizing the evaluation of teacher's work. Evaluation is highly important because it is believed that evaluation processes influence learning. Evaluation process requires planning and preparation. This does not mean that every aspect of the observation process must be anticipated, but rather that the approach used is deliberate, not random. It is necessary to at least know in advance both the anticipated learning outcomes and how the evidence will be recorded. This, however, does not in any way exclude subjectivity in the evaluation of teacher's work, which, as mentioned earlier, is characteristic of pedagogy as a science in general.

In the framework of the Latvian education system, the purpose of evaluating teacher's work by observing their actions in the classroom is to improve the quality of the teacher's work and the results achieved. This means that the underlying goal is to enhance the teacher's practice and change beliefs in line with transformative learning. While transformative learning is often associated with students' personal growth and development, it is equally important to recognize that teachers undergo their transformative journeys, which involve the following phases (Mezirov, 2009) (see Table 1).

Table 1

Transformative Learning Phases and Teachers' Work (Mezirov, 2009)

Transformative learning phase	Relation to teachers' work
A disorienting dilemma	For teachers, a disorienting dilemma can manifest as challenges in the classroom, difficulties in engaging students, or a feeling of professional stagnation. This dilemma prompts educators to question their teaching methods and philosophies.
A self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame	Teachers, like their students, can experience emotions such as fear, anger, guilt, or shame as they confront their own challenges and shortcomings. These emotions can be powerful motivators for self-reflection and change.
A critical assessment of assumptions	In this phase, teachers critically assess their assumptions about teaching and learning. They reevaluate their beliefs about education, student needs, and their roles as educators.
Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared	Educators often find solace in recognizing that their discontent and transformation are not unique. Collaborative discussions with colleagues and professional development opportunities can help teachers connect with others who share their experiences.

See next page for continuation of table

Continuation of Table 1

Transformative learning phase	Relation to teachers' work
Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and action	Teachers begin to explore new approaches to teaching, alternative methods, and innovative techniques. This phase involves considering changes in their roles as educators and relationships with students and colleagues.
Planning a course of action	In this phase, teachers plan how to implement changes in their teaching practices. They set goals, establish new strategies, and consider ways to enhance the learning experience for their students.
Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans	Teachers acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to execute their teaching plans effectively. This may involve professional development, training, or learning from their peers.
Provisional trying of new roles	Educators experiment with their new teaching methods and roles in the classroom, often on a provisional basis. They adjust their approaches based on feedback and results.
Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	As teachers gain experience with their new approaches, they build competence and self-confidence in their abilities. Confidence in their teaching methods positively influences their students' learning experiences.
A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective	The final phase involves reintegration of the transformed teaching practices into the classroom. Educators reflect on their journey and apply their newfound wisdom to create a more dynamic and effective teaching environment.

Observing teachers' lessons can be a powerful tool for motivating transformative learning in educators (Siddiqua, 2019). When done effectively, lesson observation can provide valuable feedback, encourage self-reflection, and inspire positive changes in teaching practices. Incorporating lesson observations as a way to motivate transformative learning requires a supportive and collaborative approach. It should not be seen as an evaluation tool but as a means to encourage continuous professional growth and development. When conducted in a positive and constructive manner, lesson observations can be a pivotal driver for transformative learning in teachers, ultimately benefitting both educators and their students.

Education for sustainable development is subsequently defined as a "holistic and transformational education that addresses learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment" (UNESCO, 2017). To ensure sustainable development in educational institutions, it is necessary to broaden the perspectives of teachers and administrators in education for sustainability, including human sensitivity (Salīte et al., 2021; Salīte et al., 2022). Transformative sustainability education includes solidarity, considering the experiences of students, awareness of social and environmental issues, and promoting participation in teaching and learning (Bedford, 2022). However, other researchers point out the risk that focusing primarily on psychological aspects (such as motivation, communication skills, or well-being promotion) may

negatively impact academic quality in the future (Pipere et al., 2022). Sustainable personal development, based on the values of sustainable development, ensures the individual's positive relationship with others in the long run, greater satisfaction with his/her life, including work (Briede & Drelinga, 2020).

Professional teaching knowledge is built on a dialogue between theory and practice and developed through individual and collective reflection on a growing repertoire of experiences. No two pedagogical situations are ever identical (UNESCO, 2021).

Aim of the research: To analyse ways for incorporating a more sustainable framework in the assessment of teacher's daily work.

Research question: How to make the approach to evaluating teacher's daily work more sustainable?

Tasks of the research:

1. To analyse underlying assumptions for teacher's work evaluation.
2. To describe the observation protocol used for evaluating teacher's work within the current study.
3. To provide a critical analysis of the observation protocol based on the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher's work observed.
4. To propose suggestions for enhancing the implementation of the observation protocol to achieve a more sustainable evaluation of teacher's work.

Method

Procedure

In Latgale Industrial Technical School, methodologists are involved in observing teaching lessons, and they have mutually agreed on what makes a good lesson at a vocational education institution. Observation is carried out using a standardized observation protocol, which consists of an introduction section, a statistical section, and a descriptive section.

In the introduction section, the observer notes the group, the number of students in the group as per the list, and the number of students in the class. The protocol includes information about the teacher conducting the lesson, topic of lesson, and details about the observer, the purpose of the observation, and the initiative behind the observation (whether it was organized by the administration or the teacher).

In the statistical section, the observer (quantitatively) marks the significant components of the lesson structure as "very good", "good", "average", or "not observed" (see Table 2).

In the descriptive section, the observer qualitatively assesses the strengths and necessary improvements of the lesson in the following areas: teaching, learning, and assessment. In conclusion, the observer, along with the teacher, evaluates the lesson and agrees on the necessary improvements to enhance the effectiveness of a lesson. The observation of lessons took place from September 2022 to June 2023. During the academic year, 73 lessons in vocational education institutions were observed and analysed. This study did not differentiate between general education and vocational subject lessons.

Table 2
Quantitative Indicators of Teacher's Performance Evaluation Observation Protocol

Indicator	Observed actions
A teacher's skill to teach and facilitate learning	- Is the topic of the lesson clear? - Is an achievable objective of the lesson provided? - Does a teacher rely on students' previous experience? - Is students' interest stimulated? - Are students provided with the opportunity to create their own knowledge, and is enough time allocated for it? - Are students encouraged to speak and think about the achievable objective and how it was reached?
Students' learning skills	- The ability to collaborate and work individually. - The ability to think, question, and engage in research activities. - The ability to follow instructions and complete a simple task.
A teacher's ability to assess students	- The ability to provide feedback. - The ability to teach students to provide feedback.

Data Analysis

Mathematical statistical analysis was used to analyse quantitative data of observation protocols.

Thematic interpretation of the data was used to analyse the descriptive part of observation protocols. Content analysis underlines the development of categories from the data and recognizes the importance of understanding the meaning of the context. In the present study, the authors used a qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is systematic and analytic. Textual data are analyzed and scrutinized under certain categories and the researcher constantly revises the themes or categories by moving back and forth between conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Bell et al., 2022).

Results

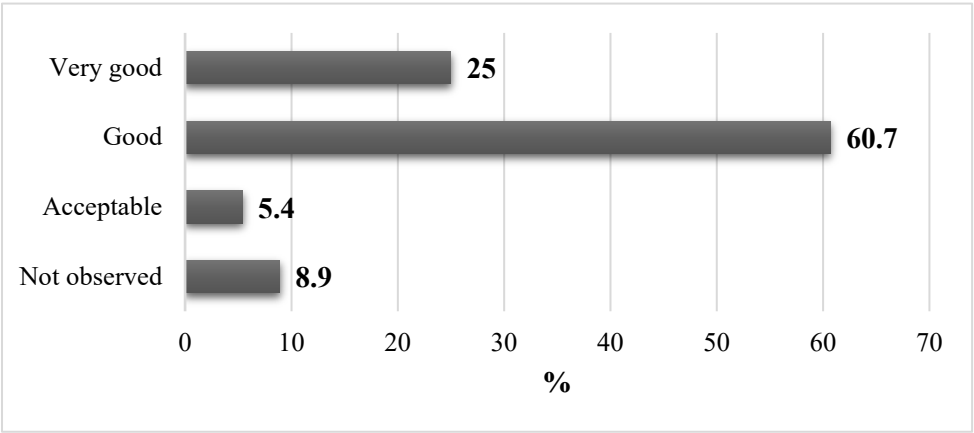
Quantitative Analysis of Teachers' Observation Protocols

When analysing the work of teachers, it was observed that most of teachers skilfully structured their lessons: they defined the topic, set achievable goals, related to students' experiences, guided the learning process, and organized feedback. They offered professionally prepared teaching materials and up-to-date presentations to the students.

However, it must be acknowledged that the observed or unobserved learning skills of the students most prominently demonstrate the quality of the educational process in the institution as a whole. Therefore, the following student skills were

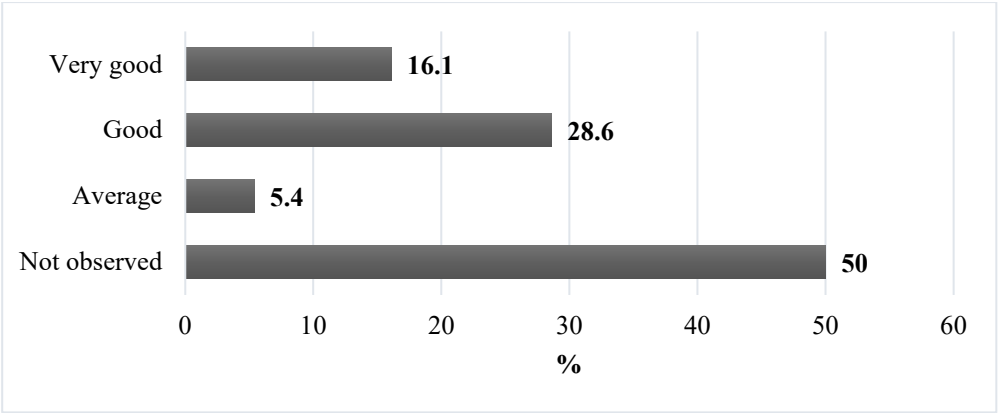
analysed: 1) questioning skills; 2) collaboration skills; 3) the ability to use training materials; 4) ability to work independently; 5) metacognitive skills.

Figure 1
Students' Questioning Skills



Students actively engage in lessons by posing thoughtful questions. A substantial number of students deliberately asked questions, driven by their curiosity and the desire for meaningful insights. In the majority of cases (60.7 %), students posed questions as a response to the teacher's guidance. However, some teachers did not provide the opportunity to ask questions and receive the necessary responses. This situation may also be attributed to challenges in question formulation – students exhibit limited questioning skills.

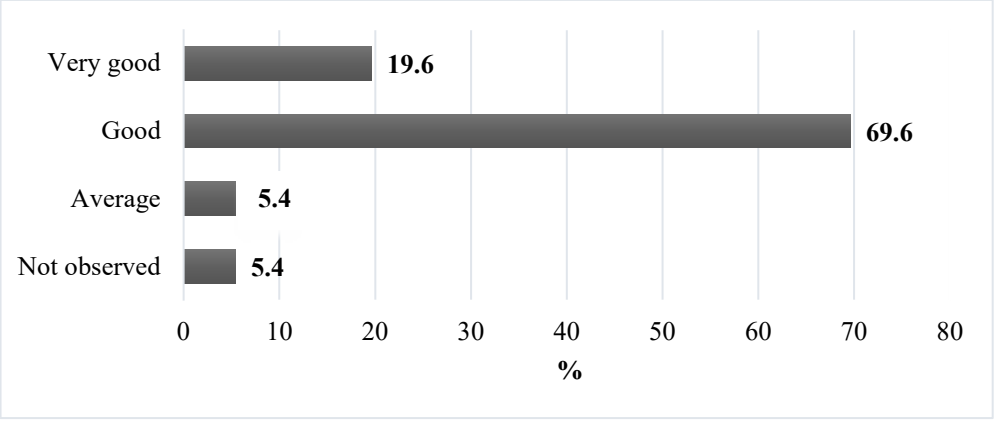
Figure 2
Students' Cooperation Skills



In half of the observed lessons, there was no provision for collaboration in pairs or groups. Consequently, 5.4 % of students face challenges in cooperating with their peers: they experience difficulties in collaboration, exhibit selectiveness, reluctance to

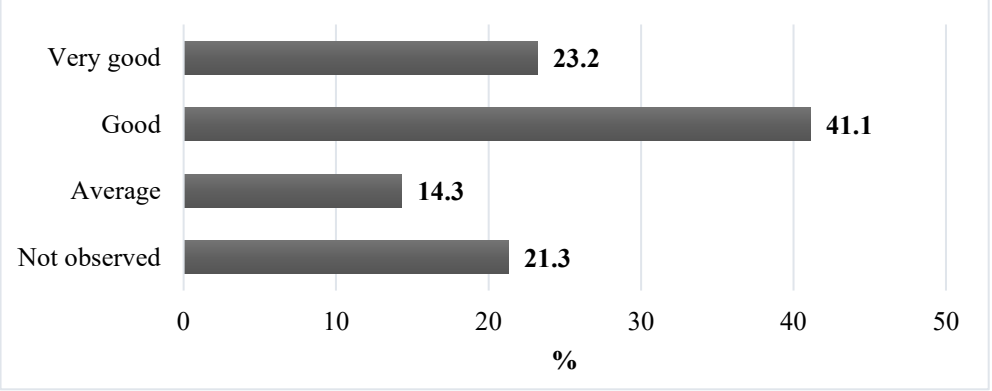
work with specific students, and encounter struggles in planning, agreement, and task completion. Creative collaboration, focused on both the process and results, was observed in 16 % of cases. Collaboration was recognized as an integral part of the learning process in 28.6 % of the lessons; nonetheless, individual students showed a decline in interest in group work, and contribution from all students was not evenly distributed.

Figure 3
Students' Ability to Use Training Materials



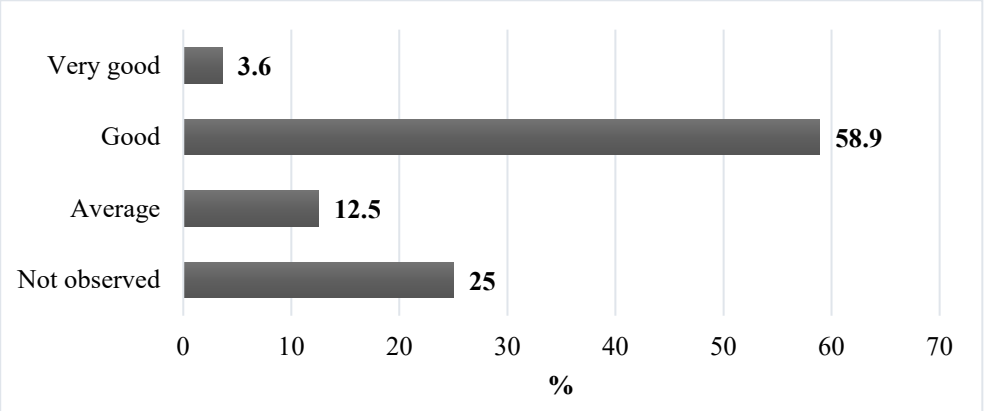
Most students demonstrated proficiency in using teaching materials, receiving assessments of good or very good. Teachers observe varying levels of confidence among students in using internet resources. Nevertheless, in about 5.4 % of the observed lessons, students were not afforded the opportunity to independently search for information. In 5.4 % of cases, students encountered difficulties in searching for information.

Figure 4
Students' Ability to Work Independently



In a significant number of observed lessons (21.3 %), independent work opportunities were lacking, with lessons predominantly structured as lectures, thereby restricting student autonomy. A substantial proportion of lessons (14.3 %) posed challenges for students in planning, executing, and analytically approaching their independent work. Consequently, this frequently led to incomplete or missing notes in their notebooks. Conversely, in a significant number of instances (approximately 41.1 % of lessons), students received guidance from the teacher while conducting their independent work, creating a more structured learning environment. A notable proportion of students (23.2 %) showcased commendable proficiency in their independent work skills, indicating their capability to work autonomously and effectively.

Figure 5
Students' Meta-Cognitive Skills



In a quarter of the observed lessons (25 %), there was no chance for students to engage in discussions and reflections on their learning, including how results were or could be achieved. In 12.5 % of the lessons, students encountered challenges in reflecting on their work. This suggests that students may not be frequently encouraged to articulate how they achieve results or comment on their work outcomes. In 58.9 % of the observed lessons, students, with the teacher's support, had the opportunity to discuss their learning process and/or results with their peers. Skillful reflection on thinking processes by students was observed in only 3.6 % of the lessons.

Qualitative Analysis of the Descriptive Part of the Observation Protocol

When analyzing the recommendations provided by educational methodologists to teachers in the descriptive part of the observation protocol, three main groups of recommendations were identified: 1) recommendations for teaching; 2) recommendations for guiding student learning; and 3) recommendations for student motivation.

Table 3
Descriptive Analysis

Recommendations	Description
Recommendations for teaching	- Diversify teaching methods by avoiding lectures as the sole instructional approach. - Implement a structured lesson format. - Utilize simple and easily understandable presentations. - Integrate the teacher's personal experiences into the teaching process. - Provide tasks that promote independent work and reinforce knowledge. - Incorporate students' personal experiences into the learning environment. - Formulate tasks for students in a clear and understandable manner.
Recommendations for teaching management	- Foster critical thinking and discussions about the actions or observations undertaken. - Promote the explanation of thought processes, emphasizing the steps taken: what, how, and why. - Differentiate tasks to cater to diverse learning needs. - Encourage comprehensive note-taking, ensuring the recording of key points through keywords, mind maps, charts, etc. - Provide tasks that facilitate independent knowledge acquisition.
Recommendations for student motivation	- Tailor teaching to align with students' interests in the profession they are studying. - Create opportunities for independent, self-paced work. - Facilitate peer learning and assistance through organized collaborative activities. - Increase positive reinforcement by praising correct answers and well-executed work. - Motivate students to comprehend what they have learned and identify areas of difficulty.

Analyzing the recommendations provided by educational methodologists to teachers for enhancing the teaching process, it becomes evident that there is a strong emphasis on the significance of personal experience. Relying on personal experience makes the learning process more meaningful and, consequently, more understandable for students. Teachers should not be afraid to use their personal experiences as students seek not only theoretical knowledge and specific skills but also value the insights gained from the personal life experiences of their educators.

Teaching management recommendations underscore the importance of two key aspects. Firstly, there is an emphasis on expanding opportunities for students' independent learning. Acknowledging the uniqueness of each student's learning style and pace, teachers are encouraged to provide tasks that enable independent knowledge acquisition and supplementation. Secondly, there is a focus on promoting students' metacognitive skills, recognizing that in today's society, the ability to offer creative and innovative solutions in complex situations is highly valued over mere factual knowledge. It can be stated that following the recommendations for teaching and teaching management will help enhance students' motivation.

Discussion and Conclusions

Teachers have a unique role to play in education. Teaching is a complex, intricate and challenging vocation that labours in the tensions between the public and the personal (UNESCO, 2021). The same can be applied to the evaluation of teacher's work when observing the lessons. On the one hand, the observer attempts to evaluate teacher's work in correspondence with state regulations and educational guidelines. On the other hand, the evaluation is also based on the personal perceptions of the observer regarding whether the specific lesson was meaningful, how the students felt during it, and the teacher's own experiences as an educator and as a student. Pedagogy is interdisciplinary, it functions as the theory or science and teachers' professional philosophy, academic discipline and practice, meets the general requirements to achieve educational, developmental and educative goals in their integrated quality (Žogla, 2018).

The authors conclude that the statistical data recorded on lesson observation protocols provide only a general overview of what is happening in the classroom. More valuable are the qualitative data, which illustrate the context of the problems and the direction toward possible solutions. Teaching is not just about an individual guiding a student through activities or lessons behind a closed classroom door. Instead, we need to think of teaching as work that occurs throughout a school and together with other educators (UNESCO, 2021). To prioritize student learning and teacher action in teaching and teaching management on the lesson observation protocol is a way to achieve the primary goal – to promote sustainable youth development by emphasising self-directed learning, personal and meaningful experience.

Problems in teachers' work evaluation can be called as wicked problems that means challenging, complex problems that usually do not yield to the simple solution (Tintoré et al., 2022). It is difficult to provide a definitive formulation of the problem. The solution of the problem or ways to improve teachers' work quality cannot be defined as true or false, but rather better or worse. All stakeholders who are involved in the education process: students, teachers, parents, administration of the educational institution have different frames of reference concerning the problem underlying cause and effect relationships related to the problem that is complex, systemic and either unknown or highly uncertain (Blok et al., 2015). The authors of the paper acknowledge that there should be a transformative shift in teacher evaluation, moving beyond mere compliance with regulations to a more sustainable approach that prioritizes student learning, collaboration, and lifelong learning skills. This approach aims to create a more meaningful and effective educational experience for both teachers and students.

In conclusion, our exploration of a more sustainable approach to evaluating teacher's work has revealed the importance of shifting the focus from mere quantitative assessments to a more holistic and qualitative perspective. Recognizing that teaching is a complex, multifaceted endeavor, our study emphasizes the significance of considering not only compliance with regulations but also the depth of engagement in the learning process and its impact on students. While statistical data provide a broad overview, it is the descriptive insights and recommendations that offer a richer understanding of the educational context, challenges, and potential solutions. Prioritizing student learning and promoting their sustainable development, with an emphasis on independent learning and developing meta-cognitive skils, are significant issues of our proposed approach to teacher's work evaluation, as well as taking into consideration teachers' beliefs, experience and attitudes in line with the observers' subjectivity.

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