



Piloting the secondary school lesson observation tool

July 2026

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Introduction

Evidence¹ shows that teachers make significant improvements to their teaching and pupil learning when they receive ongoing support and constructive feedback on their practice. This can be achieved in a cost-effective way through regular lesson observations and feedback from a coach within the school. Lesson observation for teacher professional development (TPD) is distinct from observations conducted for evaluation, focusing less on compliance and assessment and more on fostering growth and development.

In Sierra Leone, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) has introduced a standardised lesson observation tool in primary schools and recently developed a lesson observation tool for use in secondary schools. Both tools draw the World Bank TEACH tool - the primary and secondary versions.

The classroom observation tool for secondary schools aims to provide a reliable framework for school leaders to provide coaching to teachers to help improve instructional practice.

The Leh Wi Lan project supported the TSC in piloting the new lesson observation tool with 10 secondary school leaders. The pilot aimed to assess the tool's usability, identify any challenges, and understand the nature of the feedback school leaders provide to teachers when using this tool to determine how effective the tool is in supporting teacher professional development. The findings from this pilot will be instrumental in finalising the lesson observation tool and designing support for its use. Ultimately, the goal is for TSC to introduce the lesson observation tool nationwide, to embed the tool within the MBSSE's School Leadership Programme and to support all secondary school leaders to conduct regular lesson observations and coaching as a form of TPD in schools.

¹ World Bank COACH available from: [Coach-Tools-and-Resources-20220324.pdf](#)

The new Lesson Observation Tool

The full tool, instructions and rubric describing the practices is shown in Annex 1.

Classroom Observation Tool									
General Information									
School name					EMIS number				
Teacher name					Teacher's gender	Male		Female	
Coach name					Date of observation				
Coach designation (circle one)	Principal	Deputy Principal	Head of Department	SQAO	Other (please explain):				
About the lesson you observe (complete this section before the lesson starts)									
Grade(s) taught during the lesson				Total number of children in the lesson		Girls		Boys	
Subject									
Topic									
Main learning objective									
Expected sequence of activities in the lesson being observed (ask teachers about the key steps before the lesson starts)									
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
Start time of observation					Observation end time				
Teaching practices and behaviours to observe (L = Low, M = Medium, H = High)									
	N/A	L	L/M	M	M/H	H			
		1	2	3	4	5			
1. The teacher treats all children respectfully									
2. The teacher uses positive language with children									
3. The teacher responds to student needs									
4. The teacher does not exhibit bias and challenges stereotypes in the classroom									
5. The teacher sets clear behavioral expectations for classroom activities									
6. The teacher explicitly articulates the objectives of the lesson and relates classroom activities to the objectives									
7. The teacher uses questions, prompts or other strategies to determine students' level of understanding									
8. The teacher monitors most students during independent/group work									
9. The teacher adjusts teaching to the level of the children									
10. The teacher provides specific comments or prompts that help clarify student misunderstandings.									
11. The teacher provides thinking tasks									
12. Students perform thinking tasks									
13. Students explain their thinking to the teacher or ask open ended questions									
14. The teacher acknowledges students' efforts									
Time on learning									
	Snapshot 1 (5 minutes)		Snapshot 2 (12 minutes)		Snapshot 3 (20 minutes)				
Most students are actively participating in learning tasks (select yes or no for each snapshot)	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No			
Evidence for the ranking									
Key action discussed with the teacher									

Pilot design

10 school leaders (3 female, 7 male) were selected, from 5 schools for the pilot. Schools were selected from Western Rural. They were selected based on proximity to Freetown for ease of administering the pilot, whilst still ensuring representation from semi-rural locations. Schools with participants for the Sierra Leone Secondary School Leadership Programme were selected, because they had already received some training on instructional leadership. Schools with female leadership were prioritised and there was representation from both junior and senior secondary schools.

School leaders participated in a two-day training session focused on the lesson observation process and effective use of the lesson observation tool. This training included a practical exercise where participants used the Tool to observe a teacher on video, complete scores, evidence and feedback in the Tool and subsequently compare completed Tools. The full training presentation is available in Annex 2. Following the training, school leaders were asked to conduct four lesson observations each within a two-week period. 40 observations were conducted in total. The completed lesson observation tools were then submitted to the Leh Wi Lan team for analysis.

Following the observations, school leaders were invited to attend a feedback session, facilitated by Leh Wi Lan and held at Our Lady of Kwama Secondary School in Western Rural. 8 school leaders (6 male and 2 female) attended. Two did not attend because they were monitoring BECE in their school and it took longer than initially expected. During the feedback session, each school leader completed their own online survey, where they provided responses about their experience. Additionally, five school leaders were selected to participate in a focus group discussion (FGD), they answered questions to provide more details on their experiences. The online survey responses were automatically analysed and the FGD discussions were recorded and analysed by Leh Wi Lan team.

The findings from the lesson observation tool data, online survey and FGD are analysed in the next section of this report. The Leh Wi Lan team conducted the analysis, drawing on their practical experience and deep understanding of teaching and learning in Sierra Leone's secondary schools. It's important to note that their findings and recommendations were shaped by this experience and expertise.

Findings

Analysis of completed lesson observation tools

The lesson observation tool comprises four main sections:

1. Scoring teaching practices and behaviours
2. Taking a snapshot of time on learning
3. Providing evidence for the scoring
4. Key actions discussed with the teacher as feedback

Each of these sections is discussed in detail below.

1. Scoring teaching practices and behaviours

This section of the tool requires observers to look at 14 distinct teaching practices to assess the teacher's effectiveness in each area. Scores range from 1 (low) to 5 (high). A rubric, within the lesson observation tool, provides detailed descriptions of what constitutes low, medium, and high behaviours for each of the 14 teaching practices.

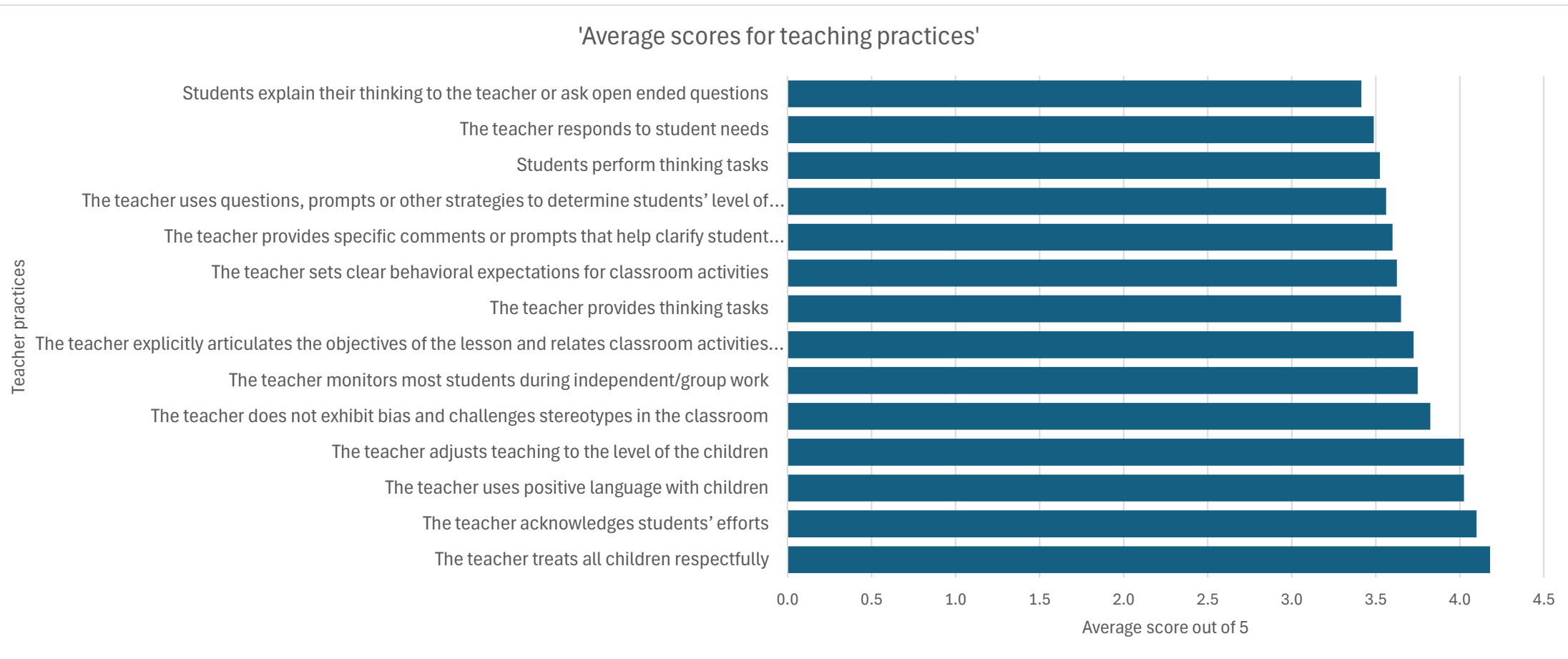
The 40 observation forms were analysed to determine the scoring trends of school leaders for each teaching practice. Figure 1 shows the number of observations recorded for each score across all teaching practices. Scores are highlighted in green if there were more than 10 observations, reflecting the common scoring trends among school leaders. Most school leaders scored a 3, 4, or 5 across all teaching practices, which appears to be quite generous scoring. To identify which teaching practices received the highest and lowest scores, an average was calculated. Figure 2 shows the average scores for each teaching practice.

Figure 1 Total number of observation scores

For example, for practice 1, ‘The teacher treats all children respectfully’ there were 39 observations. In 22 observations, the observer assigned the highest score (5). In 7 observations, the score assigned was 4, while 6 observations gave score of 3. The score of 2 was assigned three times and one observer gave the lowest score of 1.

Teaching practices and behaviours to observe (L = Low, M = Medium, H = High)						
	N/A	L	L/M	M	M/H	H
		1	2	3	4	5
1. The teacher treats all children respectfully		1	3	6	7	22
2. The teacher uses positive language with children		0	2	8	17	13
3. The teacher responds to student needs		2	3	15	15	6
4. The teacher does not exhibit bias and challenges stereotypes in the classroom		1	3	11	12	13
5. The teacher sets clear behavioral expectations for classroom activities		2	5	7	18	8
6. The teacher explicitly articulates the objectives of the lesson and relates classroom activities to the objectives		2	5	10	8	15
7. The teacher uses questions, prompts or other strategies to determine students’ level of understanding		6	3	5	16	11
8. The teacher monitors most students during independent/group work		5	3	6	9	17
9. The teacher adjusts teaching to the level of the children		1	2	7	15	15
10. The teacher provides specific comments or prompts that help clarify student misunderstandings.		2	3	12	15	8
11. The teacher provides thinking tasks		5	4	5	12	14
12. Students perform thinking tasks		7	2	8	9	14
13. Students explain their thinking to the teacher or ask open ended questions		4	7	8	12	10
14. The teacher acknowledges students’ efforts		3	0	6	12	19

Figure 2 Average scores for teacher practices



Interestingly, the two student behaviours are among the lowest average scores.

The practices with the highest average scores, all of 4 or above, are:

1. Teacher treats all children respectfully
2. Teacher acknowledges student efforts
3. Teacher uses positive language with children
4. Teacher adjusts teaching to the level of the child

The higher scores in these areas may indicate that teachers have received effective training and are confident in these practices. Alternatively, it could suggest that observers find these behaviours easier to recognize and score highly during lessons. The following sections will delve into the evidence and feedback notes to further explore these trends.

2. Time on learning

The Tool asked school leaders to check at specified intervals if pupils were actively participating in learning tasks. The table below shows the percentage of 'yes' responses, indicating that pupils were actively engaged in learning. **The findings reveal that pupils were involved in active learning during most lesson snapshots.** According to feedback gathered during the focus group discussion (FGD), often students were not actively participating in learning during the first five minutes of the lesson because the teacher was typically explaining the objective, and pupils were listening. This could explain the lower score in snapshot 1. It is important to note that these findings are influenced by the observers' perception of 'active learning'. The tool and training provided limited guidance on what constitutes active learning, which may vary by observer.

Figure 3 Percentage of lesson snapshots showing pupils actively learning

Snapshot 1 (5 minutes)	Snapshot 2 (12 minutes)	Snapshot 3 (20 minutes)
65%	73%	75%

3. Evidence for the ranking

The Tool includes a section titled ‘Evidence for the Ranking’. School leaders were asked to provide specific examples of what they observed the teacher doing as evidence of teaching practices. For instance, ‘teacher uses students' names, says please and thank you’ is evidence of the teacher treating all students respectfully. School leaders were guided on how to do this through the rubric descriptors, which provide example behaviours at low, medium, and high levels.

The open responses in this section were collated and analysed. **The evidence provided by school leaders generally lacked depth and insight.** While a few school leaders provided specific examples of behaviour (as shown in box 1 below), most reiterated 14 teaching practices and whether they occurred, partially occurred, or did not occur. They did not include detailed descriptions or specific examples of what they observed the teacher doing that demonstrated this practice. Additionally, many did not explain how effectively or ineffectively the teacher performed these practices in alignment with the rubric. For instance, the nuances between scoring a 5 and not a 3, were not explained. Some example responses are shown in box 2 below.

Box 1. Responses in section ‘Evidence for the Ranking’ that provide some description of what the teacher was doing.

- *“The teacher treat all children respectfully by given them appraisals and calling them their names” (4)*
- *“The pupils were treated respectfully because even when a child was not paying attention he cautioned him respectfully” (16)*
- *“Teacher used words like good work done, Keep it up, excellent” (7)*
- *“She responded to pupils needs, there were pupils without pens, she gave them pens, she also prepared teaching aids” (4)*

Box 2. Responses in section ‘Evidence for the Ranking’ that describe the practice being partially achieved but do not describe effectiveness.

- *“He made all efforts to respond to their needs **but at some point failed** to help a child with clear explanation” (8) [Scores 4 for responding to student’s needs]*
- *“The teacher made comments **not on most children’s work**” (7) [Scores 4 for providing comments or prompts to clarify misunderstanding]*
- *“Teacher motivated children’s effort **but not frequently**”. (14) [Scores 4 for acknowledge students efforts]*
- *“He did articulate the lesson objectives and relate classroom activities to them **but at some point deviated**”. (30) [Scores 2 for articulates objectives and relates activities]*
- *“Most pupils tries to explain the thinking tasks **although not exactly**”. (18) [Scores 4 for students perform thinking tasks]*

4. Key action discussed with teacher

The Tool includes a section titled ‘Key action discussed with teacher’. School leaders were asked to report the feedback they gave to the teacher. During training, they were encouraged to provide one actionable item to the teacher, although the Tool did not specify what to write here.

The open text entered in this box was sorted and analysed. Actions for teacher improvement were separated into individual statements aligning with one practice. A total of 88 individual action statements were counted.

Quality of action statements

14 (out of 40) forms did not include specific action for the teacher in this box, instead the school leader had misinterpreted the instructions and written ‘feedback given on what was observed’. One leader provided 7 statements, while most gave 3 to 4 statements, indicating 3 or 4 actions for the teacher to improve. This is too many action statements for a teacher to be able to work on effectively. It would be better if they focused on one or two actions only.

The completed action statements were relevant and specific; however, they were often too brief to help a teacher understand exactly what they needed to do. While most were written in a positive tone, telling the teacher what to do to improve, some statements merely pointed out what the teacher did not do, which is less helpful. A few statements began with praise for the teacher before suggesting areas for further improvement. Many statements simply listed the action without additional context.

The findings indicate that guidance on the Tool should be clearer to tell the observer what to write in this section.

Analysis of action statements aligned to teaching practices

The analysis examined the content of action statements and their alignment with teacher practices. Action statements were coded and grouped under similar themes. Some interpretation was required to understand the meaning behind certain action statements, and some could fit into multiple categories. While this coding is not perfect, it provides a useful guide to the teacher and student behaviours that the feedback focuses on.

Figure 4 illustrates the number of action statements that align with each teaching practice from the observation tool. Figure 5 presents the action statements that correspond to teaching practices not covered by the lesson observation tool.

Figure 4 Number of action statements for each teaching practice from the observation tool

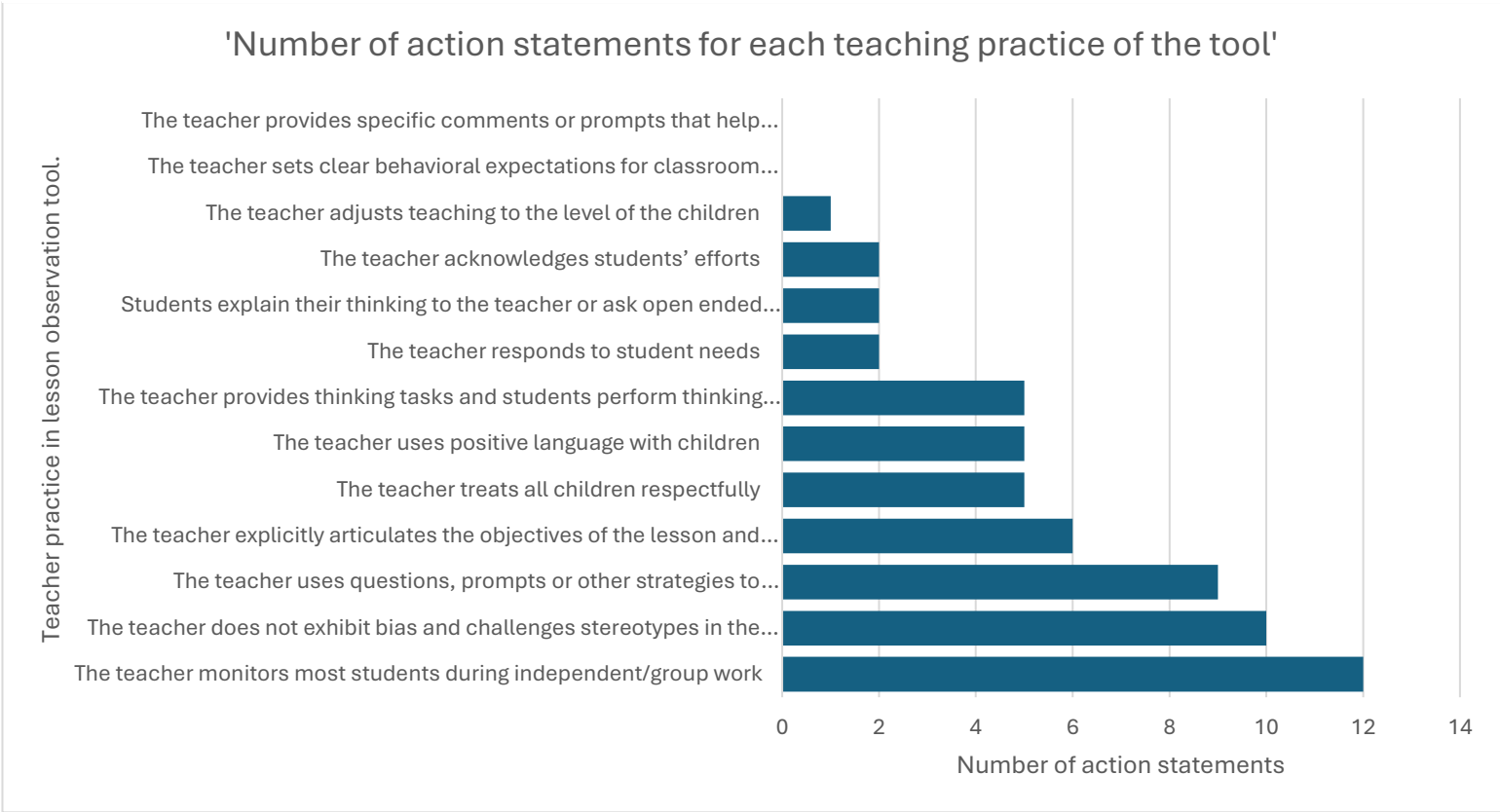
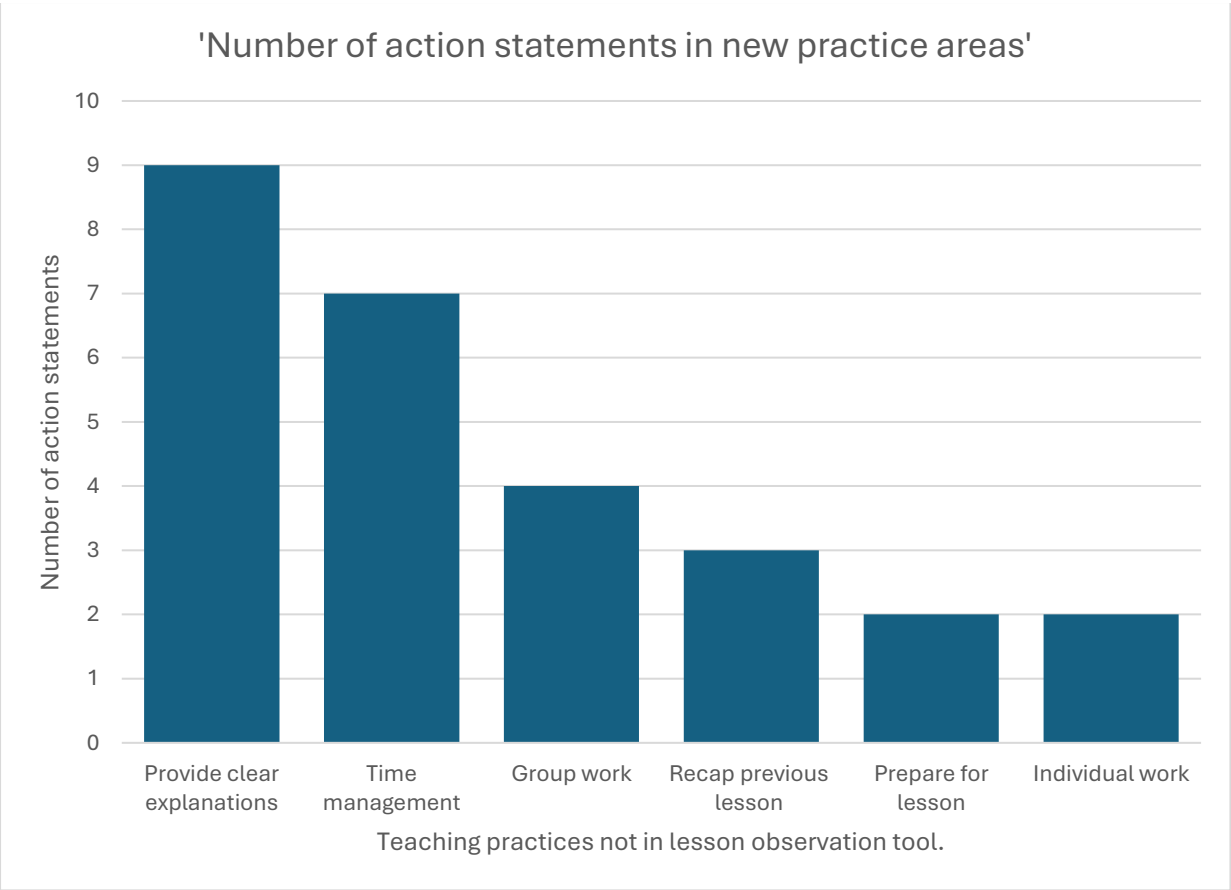


Figure 5 Number of action statements corresponding to teaching practices not covered by the observation tool



The most common action statements were:

1. Monitor all pupils when they are working in groups (14% of statements)
2. Provide more opportunities for girls to participate in the lesson, not just boys (11%)
3. Ask questions to all pupils to determine understanding (10%)
4. Provide clear explanations of the topic (using teaching aids) (10%)
5. Arrive on time and manage time effectively during the lesson (8%)

These action statements are likely common because they are easy to understand and observe (or not observe). In contrast, the teacher practice that received no action statements - *'The teacher provides specific comments or prompts that help clarify student misunderstandings'*, is more complex to recognize in the classroom. It requires a technical understanding of identifying when pupils are not understanding and knowing how to intervene effectively to guide the learning back on track. This is a much more advanced pedagogical skill to observe and give feedback on.

The action statements primarily focused on behaviours described by the rubric as 'low' or 'medium'. It was mainly aimed at helping teachers initiate these practices rather than providing detailed guidance on how to perform them effectively. Feedback rarely guided teachers towards 'high' performance behaviours, as described in the rubric.

The box below provides further analysis of the five most common action statements.

Analysis of five most common actions for teacher improvement

1. Monitor students during independent / group work

This was the most common feedback response. There were 12 (14%) feedback statements that fit under the teacher behaviour of monitoring student work. This feedback was given at least once by 7 different school leaders across 4 different schools. It was also used across JSS and SSS classes. Some feedback statements simply ask for the practice to be done, such as 'monitor pupils work,' while others provided more specific directions, like 'move between rows' or 'move to the back to monitor work'. This feedback helps teachers carry out the teaching practice at a 'medium' level, as defined by the rubric. However, to attain 'high' performance, teachers need to be guided on how to do this systematically, as well as receiving guidance on how to monitor work effectively. For example, the rubric includes actions like "listen to discussions," "clarify concepts," or "ask questions".

2. Ask and elicit questions to determine students' level of understanding

There were 11 (13%) feedback statements that fit under the teacher behaviour of asking and eliciting questions. This aligns to two practices on the observation tool: *The teacher uses questions, prompts or other strategies to determine students' level of understanding and students explain their thinking to the teacher or ask open-ended questions*. These practices have been grouped because asking questions also provides an opportunity for students to explain their thinking, if facilitated well. 9 statements related to the first practice, and 2 to the second. This feedback was given at least once by 7 different school leaders across 4 different schools and was used in both JSS and SSS classes.

Most action statements were broad, for example, 'Teacher allow pupils to answer questions'. This type of feedback is limited and only guides the teacher towards a 'low' performance of this practice. To demonstrate 'medium' level, as described by the rubric, the teacher needs to use questioning to determine student's level of understanding. Only two statements specified questioning to determine

student's level of understanding. A few statements include some guidance on how to perform the practice, such as 'asking questions related to what was taught' or 'providing questions for homework'. However, this guidance was generally quite limited. To help teachers improve further, the feedback needs to go beyond simply asking teachers and pupils to engage in questioning; it should also consider what types of questions should be asked and how teachers can use the responses to determine students' levels of understanding.

3. Include all learners and do not exhibit bias

There were 10 (11%) feedback statements that fit under the teacher behaviour of including all learners and not exhibiting bias. This feedback was given by both female and male school leaders and was used in both JSS and SSS classes. It given at least once by 4 different school leaders across 2 different schools. It wasn't as widely spread as the previous two practices. Two school leaders gave feedback on this behaviour three times. Most of the action statements related to including girls (7 out of 10). One related to including children at the back of the room, one specified children with disabilities. And two were about being equal to all and did not specify a certain group of students.

Feedback was mostly about facilitating more opportunities for girls to participate in the lesson, usually by asking them questions. For example, *'She must involve both boys and girls including children with disabilities during her teaching ignoring the traditional myth that boys are much more intelligent than girls'*. The feedback mostly guides teacher towards 'low' or 'medium' behaviours of the rubric. To guide teachers to improve further in this area, and demonstrate 'high' performance, feedback should include specific ways for girls to participate equally for example answering difficult questions, speaking out in group tasks, giving encouraging feedback to both genders, giving equal responsibilities. It should also include challenging negative stereotypes.

4. Provide clear explanations

There were 9 (10%) feedback statements that fit under the teacher behaviour of providing clear explanations. It was given at least once by 3 different school leaders across 2 different schools (with 8 of the 9 statements coming from one school). One school leader gave feedback on this behaviour four times. It is less widely used and heavily used in one school and with one school leader.

Two actions were broad statements asking teachers to provide clear explanations of the topic. Five action statements asked teachers to use teaching aids (to support explanations). One action asked the teacher to relate explanations to real life and one action asked the teacher to use demonstrations. Providing clear explanations is not included in the lesson observation tool but does link to the practice: The teacher explains content using multiple forms of representation on the World Bank TEACH tool. TSC may want to consider adding this practice to the Tool, but only if another practice is removed as it would not be useful to increase the number of observed practices.

5. Time management

There were 7 feedback statements that fit under the teacher behaviour of managing time effectively. Three statements related to starting the lesson on time and four related to managing time well during lesson activities. It wasn't as widely spread and was given at least once by 3 different school leaders across 2 different schools. One school leaders gave feedback on this behaviour three times.

The action statements are limited and ask the teacher to manage time without specifying how to do this or which elements of the lesson need better management. However, the inclusion of this feedback, when it is not included in the observation tool teaching practices, suggests that time management is a crucial factor affecting the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Arriving at lessons on time is more of a conduct issue, that could be improved through management. Time management during the lesson activities is most closely captured in the section 'Time on Learning' in the observation tool. If teacher's time management is poor, then pupils will not be engaged in learning tasks. Making the connection between the teacher's behaviour and pupil's behaviour would be valuable here.

Analysis of 14 teaching practices

This section provides an analysis of each of the 14 teaching practices using findings from all sections of the observation tool.

The analysis suggests the 14 practices can be grouped as follows:

Group 1: Relatively well understood, requires some more support to understand high performance as described in the rubric

The teacher uses positive language with children
The teacher does not exhibit bias and challenges stereotypes in the classroom
The teacher explicitly articulates the objectives of the lesson and relates classroom activities to the objectives
The teacher monitors most students during independent/group work

Group 2: Require more training and support to understand and observe effectively

The teacher responds to students needs
The teacher uses questions, prompts or other strategies to determine students' level of understanding
The teacher provides thinking tasks and students perform thinking tasks
Students explain their thinking to the teacher or ask open ended questions

Group 3: Could be edited or removed to simplify the tool

The teacher treats all children respectfully
The teacher sets clear behavioral expectations for classroom activities
The teacher provides specific comments or prompts that help clarify student misunderstandings.
The teacher acknowledges students' efforts
The teacher adjusts teaching to the level of the children

The full analysis of each teaching practice is shown in Annex 3.

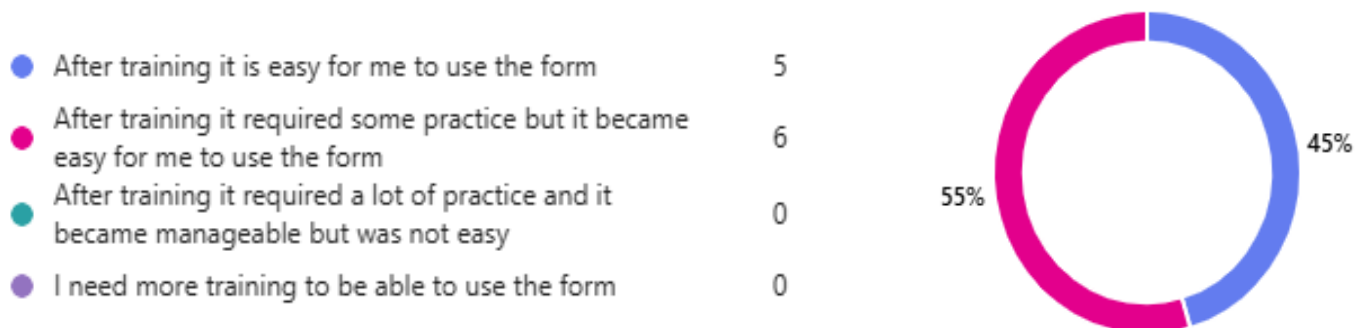
Analysis of survey and focus group discussions

The survey and focus group discussions (FGD) were designed to understand school leader's perspectives on the usability, relevance and effectiveness of the lesson observation tool for supporting teacher professional development. The findings from both the survey responses and FGD were analysed and are presented below. The survey and FGD questions are available in Annex 4.

Usability of the form

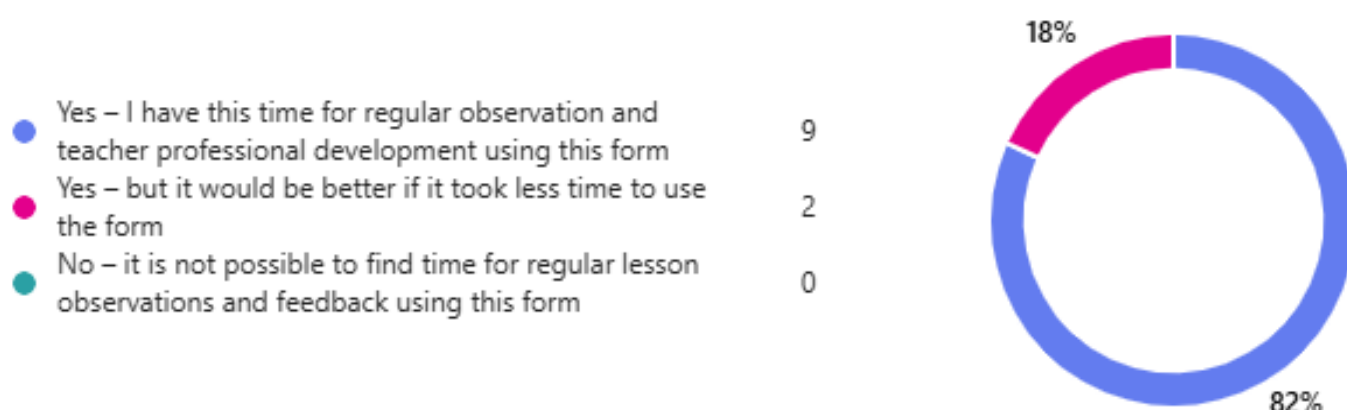
All school leaders said they understood the lesson observation tool and felt able to use it. They mentioned that the training helped them use it, one participant in the FGD explained that going through each of the 14 teaching practices systematically during training meant they were able to observe them more easily during lessons. Some participants noted that it took some practice using the tool but it became easier as they did more lesson observations. Figure 6 below shows participants responses on usability. **The findings highlight the importance of receiving comprehensive training on all 14 teaching practices before using the tool.**

Figure 6 School leader responses on ease of using the form



School leaders said they had adequate time within their schedules to conduct the observations, complete the observation form and give feedback to teachers. In the survey most said it typically took 1-2 hours. During the focus group discussion they expanded on this and said the observation was usually a double period of 1 hour 20 minutes. They were able to write up and give feedback the same day. Most participants said they have time to continue doing this in future, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7 School leader responses on time available for using the lesson observation tool



Most school leaders thought the system of scoring teacher practices from 1 – 5 works well. However, two school leaders (18%) suggested that a 1-3 scoring system might be more suitable. This perspective slightly contradicts the evidence and feedback analysis, which indicated that school leaders typically observed whether a practice was happening, not happening, or partially happening, aligning more closely with a 3-point scale. The feedback from school leaders rarely included the detailed nuances that a 5-point scale would capture. **This suggests it may be useful to review the scoring system and decide what scale is most effective for the purpose of teacher professional development.**

Through the survey and FGD, school leaders also shared some challenges using the tool, these included:

- Two participants noted challenges using the snapshot feature, as they were unclear how to use the timing to check pupil learning.
- School leaders also reported challenges in gathering all the evidence from the observation. During the FGD, one participant mentioned when they reviewed their observation notes after the lesson, they didn't have much evidence for the 14 teaching practices. Another noted that the evidence they had gathered was so extensive that it took time to organise it all and write it up in the form. Another said that the space on the form for writing evidence is too small and could be improved. **This suggests the process of gathering and recording evidence could be made more efficient.**

Value of the form for supporting teacher professional development

Observing teaching practices

School leaders agreed that all 14 teaching practices of the tool are relevant and will help teaching and learning improve in their schools. However, during the FGD, two school leaders mentioned that when they shared the tool with their teachers, the teachers' were shocked and thought there were too many practice areas. This perspective is important as the teacher is central to changing teaching and learning and the process needs to be supportive, not overwhelming.

School leaders mentioned during the FGD that several of the teaching practices included in the tool are new to teachers and several more are not well established within teaching. This slightly contradicts to school leader's scoring of the 14 practices, which was typically at the higher end of the scale, suggesting teachers are competent.

Another challenge school leaders discussed in the FGD is that teacher competency varies throughout the lesson. They might demonstrate a teaching practice well, and then later fail to demonstrate it. This is challenging to observe as it requires focused attention on what the teacher is doing throughout the lesson and across 14 different teaching practices.

Despite these challenges, school leaders saw value in all 14 teaching practices. Even though they might be new to teachers, they are important to include in an observation tool, to allow teachers to make progress over time. They suggested that more support is needed for teachers to understand these practices and be able to implement them effectively.

Two additional teaching practices were proposed for inclusion on the form by some school leaders: 1) managing students misbehaving in lessons 2) how the teacher is dressed, noting they should be smartly dressed because they are role models to pupils.

Giving feedback to help teachers improve

School leaders said that the tool helped them identify teacher strengths and weaknesses and give specific and relevant feedback to teachers, and the feedback was well received. This is illustrated in Figures 8, 9 and 10, responses from the survey.

Figure 8 'The Tool helps me clearly identify what the teacher has done well'

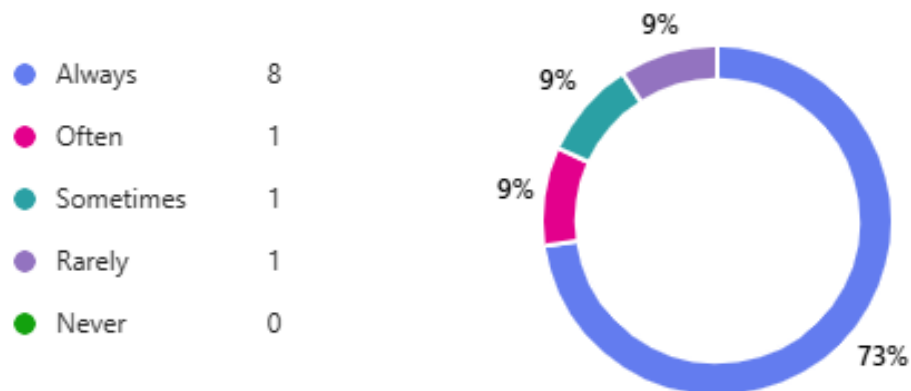


Figure 9 The Tool helps me identify where teachers need to improve

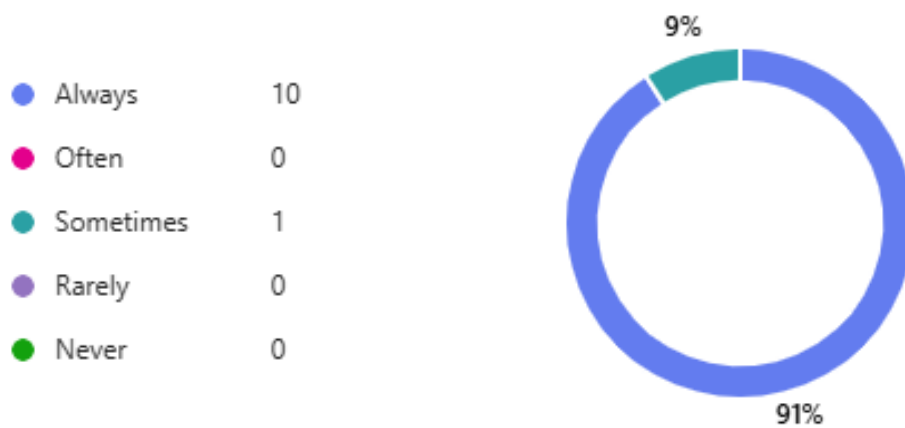
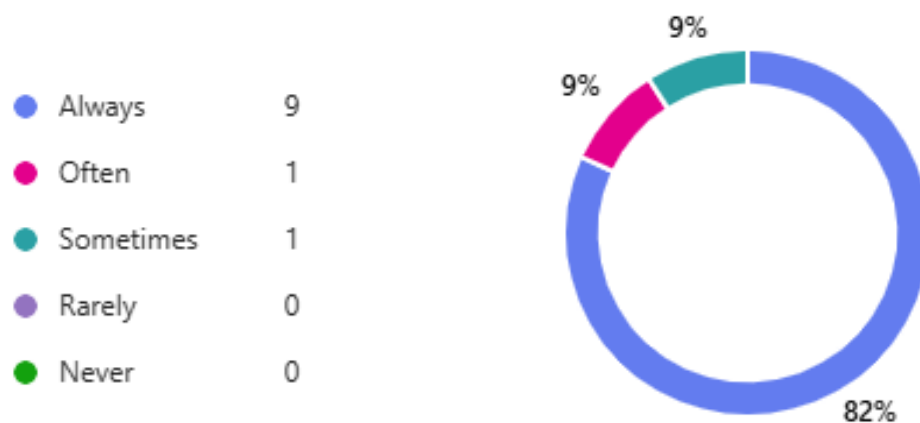


Figure 10 The Tool helps me provide feedback that is specific and helps the teacher improve



The analysis of the completed action statements revealed that feedback to teachers was often very brief. However, the focus group discussion (FGD) suggested that school leaders are engaging in more in-depth conversations. For example, one school leader stated:

“I observed that the teacher was focusing more on the boys, so during my feedback I tried to encourage him to concentrate on the girls, the excuse he tend to give is: “but the girls are very slow, very weak”. I told him yes it is because the girls are weak that we need to encourage them. The girls are improving in the sciences. Next time try and encourage the girls”.

Others described how they gave feedback about monitoring work, positive language, giving thinking tasks , explaining why these practices are important. However, there was still little evidence of school leaders detailing how to do practices effectively.

Responses in the FGD indicated that school leaders are now providing growth-oriented feedback, discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of teachers. This approach is new and was learned during training. They confirmed that they are not giving just one action statement but rather providing feedback on all observed teaching practices. While teachers were reportedly happy with this, it is unlikely to result in changed practice and it would be better to prioritise one or two practices for improvement.

Additionally, school leaders mentioned that giving feedback quickly after the observation is a new practice they have adopted as a result of the training. They usually call the teacher to their office for this feedback session.

The findings suggest the lesson observation tool has strengthened the feedback process and supported school leaders to give more constructive feedback, although they need more guidance to make the feedback actionable and aligned to the rubric in the tool.

Teacher’s experiences

The pilot did not directly gather teacher’s perspectives but did ask school leaders for their views on teacher experiences. They reported generally positive experiences amongst teachers. Teachers trusted the process and felt well-prepared in advance, which helped them know what to expect and feel happy about it. They were open to acknowledging their weaknesses and appreciated knowing what to do to improve. Additionally, they were pleased to receive feedback on what they did well.

School leaders as instructional leaders

During the focus group discussion (FGD), school leaders emphasized the importance and value of conducting lesson observations. One school leader noted that the classroom is where they can truly see what teaching and learning are like, and they have a responsibility to be present. The leaders agreed that monitoring teaching is crucial. One participant mentioned that their presence in classrooms and conducting observations sends a clear message across the school: teachers and pupils know that the principal is actively engaged with teaching, which will help improve learning.

The school leaders in the FGD also believed that the feedback they provide after lesson observations will lead to improved practices. One participant described an instance where they were walking past a classroom and saw that the teacher was already acting on their feedback by walking around the room and monitoring learning.

Suggestions for improvement and scale-up

All school leaders said they will continue to use the form and lesson observation process. The school leaders in the FGD agreed that the form should be given to all schools and used nationally. They had the following suggestions for national use:

- A two-day training is appropriate to learn how to use the tool. In addition, termly refresher trainings would support effective use. School leaders from the pilot could be facilitators.
- Consider adding indicators on managing behaviour and teacher dress code
- Consider providing more space on the form for writing up evidence
- Provide digital and hard copies of the form for continued use

Reflections and insights

The pilot of the lesson observation tool shows strong potential to enhance instructional leadership and support teacher professional development. Several aspects of the tool and its implementation worked well, while others revealed opportunities for refinement and deeper support.

What Worked Well:

The observation tool was widely seen as usable, relevant, and effective. School leaders appreciated the structured framework of the 14 teaching practices, and the training helped prepare them for observing lessons against these 14 practices. Most school leaders felt confident in using the tool and noted that it helped them identify both strengths and weaknesses in teaching practice. Feedback was typically delivered promptly and in a more constructive manner, for example by engaging teachers positively and focusing improvement on teaching practices provided in the tool. Teachers responded positively, appreciating the clarity and transparency of the process.

Challenges and limitations:

Despite its strengths, the tool's implementation encountered some challenges. School leaders struggled to gather detailed evidence of teaching practices to justify scoring, and the open-ended responses in the observation forms were often vague. Some indicators—such as "responding to student needs" and "providing specific comments to address misunderstandings"—appeared harder to observe and yielded less meaningful evidence and feedback. Whilst feedback was aligned to the practice areas of the tool, it often lacked the detail needed to make it actionable and to help teachers understand exactly what they need to do to improve. Especially helping teachers to move from doing a practice to doing it effectively. Overloading teachers with too many action points during feedback sessions also has potential to limit the impact of suggestions for improvement.

Usability of the lesson observation tool:

The pilot shows that the lesson observation tool is feasible to implement within school leader's schedules. After an orientation, school leaders felt confident using the tool, and it became easier with continued use. They enjoyed using it and expressed their intention to continue utilising it for observations in their schools.

The tool's comprehensiveness is both a strength and a limitation. Observing and scoring all 14 practices in a single lesson is demanding and risks superficial assessments. Whilst the 1–5 scoring scale was used and appreciated by school leaders, many gave high scores not supported by evidence. The evidence for practices scored as '5' often reflected rubric descriptors for a '3'. This suggests that some teaching practices are not well understood, and observers require more support to guide improvement within these teaching practices. It is worth considering the value of the 1–5 scale. If it is not being used to nuance the practices, then a scale from 1–3 could be better for guiding teacher professional development.

The guidance provided on the lesson observation tool could be clearer by instructing observers on what to write for sections 'Evidence of the ranking' and 'Key action discussed with teacher'. This will help elicit more actionable feedback. Additionally, a minimum of 2- days of orientation training with an additional day conducting classroom observations using the tool is also critical to enable an initial understanding and effective use of the tool.

How feedback was influenced by the tool

The lesson observation tool significantly influenced the feedback process. It facilitated focused, relevant, and well-received feedback conversations. It ensured that feedback was directly related to the practices outlined in the tool, supporting school leaders in moving beyond general impressions toward more specific, evidence-based feedback. Additionally, it encouraged timely post-lesson reflection and created a shared language for discussing teaching quality.

The findings show common action statements given to teachers included guiding teachers to monitor group work as well as including girls in questioning. Whilst more complex teaching practices such as *'The teacher provides specific comments or prompts that help clarify student misunderstandings'*, received fewer action statements. Many action statements were too brief to help teachers change their practice. They did not provide specific guidance on what the teacher needed to do, and did not align with the tool's rubric, especially for guiding teachers towards high performance. They were also too many, some had up to 7 action statements which is too much for a teacher to take on.

More support is needed for observers to align feedback with evidence and the tool's rubric descriptors and make it more actionable.

How the tool supports teacher professional development

Both teachers and school leaders welcomed the well-defined teaching practices as a framework for coaching, observation and professional development. Teachers benefited from understanding both what they are doing well and where they need to improve, and were willing to work on these areas to improve.

The pilot indicated that some teaching practices are easier to observe and support, such as using positive language, treating children respectfully, including girls during questioning and monitoring student group work. Others, like determining student's level of understanding, responding to student's needs, engaging students in thinking tasks or addressing learning misconceptions, require deeper pedagogical expertise to guide improvement. Most school leaders were unable to provide useful evidence or constructive feedback for these practices.

The pilot also revealed that teachers were more likely to receive support for initiating a practice rather than improving and doing it effectively. Feedback primarily focused on behaviours described by the rubric as 'low' or 'medium', and rarely guided teachers towards 'high' performance behaviours.

To enhance the effectiveness of observation and coaching for TPD, it may be beneficial for observers to focus more deeply on fewer practices within a lesson. Additionally, any CPD opportunities for teachers or school leaders should be aligned with the 14 teaching practices.

How the tool supports instructional leadership

School leaders felt empowered to conduct lesson observations and provide feedback to teachers on their strengths and areas for improvement. The tool facilitated a shift from inspection-style monitoring to a more growth-oriented coaching approach. School leaders recognised that to be effective, they need to be closely involved in teaching and learning within their school. The entire school community benefits from acknowledging that the school leader is actively engaged in enhancing teaching and learning.

Recommendations

1. Refine the lesson observation tool.

The tool could be improved in the following ways:

- a) Consider reducing the number of teacher practices. Teaching practices 10 and 14, did not contribute meaningfully and are not in the primary school lesson observation tool so may be removed.
- b) Review the description for behavioural expectations and include managing misbehaviour.
- c) Offer a 1 – 3 scoring option for schools that prefer simpler distinctions: not demonstrated, partially demonstrated, demonstrated well.
- d) Improve guidance on how to complete the ‘evidence for ranking’ and ‘action statement’ sections, limiting actions to one or two.

An example refined tool is shown in Annex 5.

2. Strengthen understanding of the key practices

Review the rubric descriptions of the practices. Consider ways to make them more easily understood, for example through demonstration videos of classrooms in Sierra Leone.

Align continuous TPD with the 14 teaching practices. Prioritise pedagogies such as determining pupil’s understanding, using thinking tasks and adjusting teaching to pupil needs. Use demonstration videos and online peer learning groups to facilitate learning if face-to-face support is not possible.

3. Strengthen feedback conversations

Support observers to align feedback with evidence and the tool’s rubric descriptors. This requires deeper understanding of each practice area. Guide observers to give fewer action statements and ensure each is specific and actionable. Consider ways to provide continuous support in these skills so observers can improve gradually over time.

4. Finalise orientation training package

- a. Adapt the primary lesson observation and coaching manual for use in secondary schools.
- b. Check the PowerPoint orientation aligns with the manual and make it available as part of the orientation package.
- c. Incorporate lesson observation practice in the orientation, ideally with school based observations, alternatively with updated classroom practice videos that focus on the 14 teaching practices.

5. Identify school leaders with demonstrated capacity to scale to next

Before introducing the tool nationwide, introduce it to school leaders who have some demonstrated capacity to be able to use it effectively with the limited resources available, For example, school leaders in the School Leadership Programme.

Conclusion

The pilot of the lesson observation tool shows strong potential to enhance instructional leadership and support teacher professional development in Sierra Leone. While the tool is generally effective and well-received, there are opportunities for refinement and deeper support to maximize its impact. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the recommendations, the TSC can ensure that the tool effectively supports teachers in improving their instructional practices and ultimately enhances student learning outcomes.

List of annexes

Annex 1: Lesson Observation Tool and rubric

Annex 2: Presentation for Training

Annex 3: Analysis of all 14 teaching practices

Annex 4: Survey and FGD questions

Annex 5. Suggested Lesson Observation Tool

Annex 3

Analysis of all 14 teaching practices.

The teacher treats all children respectfully						
Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
4.2	5	1	3	6	7	22
This practice had the second highest average score, suggesting that it is the practice most teachers can perform competently. To excel in this area, teachers should be observed using students' names, saying "please" and "thank you," or other culturally relevant signs of respect. This behaviour is relatively easy for teachers to demonstrate, and it is more likely they will do it when being observed by a school leader, which may explain the high scores. This practice doesn't appear to add meaningful value to the teachers' professional development as it doesn't feature much in the evidence and action statements. If the TSC aims to simplify the form, this practice area could be omitted, it is important, but is similar to the practice of using positive language.						

The teacher uses positive language with children						
Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
4.0	5	0	2	8	17	13
This practice had the third highest average score, suggesting that it is the practice most teachers can perform competently. To excel in this area, teachers should be observed consistently using encouraging phrases and gestures, such as 'well done', 'very good' and clapping. This behaviour is relatively easy for teachers to demonstrate, and it is more likely they will do it when being observed by a school leader, which may explain the high scores. The evidence notes and action statements are relatively strong for this practice. They either ask teachers to use 'positive language' or 'praise' and most give examples such as 'say well done'. They suggest school leaders have a good understand of how this practice can be done effectively. Example action statement: <i>"I advise that in her next lesson to improve on using positive language on the pupils. Pupils will be more active if you use many positive language like excellent, well done, very good, clap for her/him. It makes the pupils feel good."</i>						

The teacher responds to students needs						
Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.5	2	2	3	15	15	6

This is one of the lower scoring practice areas, comparatively. Although most teachers were scored a 3 or a 4 demonstrating medium understanding and application in lessons.

To excel in this practice teachers need to identify individual students needs and promptly respond to their needs, addressing the issue or problem. There are very few evidence notes and action statements related to this practice. Where this practice is referenced, the action statements are general:

- *'He must try very hard to respond on the needs of the children'.*
- *'He should demonstrates some understanding about the student needs to answer the questions or come to the board'*

The evidence notes related to this practice suggest that students' needs are met by answering questions, explaining things clearly using aids, and in one case, providing pens for students. However, questioning and explanation are not the intended behaviours for this practice. It is more about addressing emotional, material, or physical needs that arise beyond general learning. It might be the case that students' needs are not clear in the lesson, either going unnoticed by the observer or the children not speaking up or showing their needs through their behaviours. This was the case during the practice video in the training, making it quite difficult to observe this practice. **This practice may need greater explanation during training on the lesson observation tool.**

The teacher does not exhibit bias and challenges stereotypes in the classroom

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.8	10	1	3	11	12	13

This practice area received a relatively even spread of teachers scoring 3, 4, and 5, suggesting most teachers do it but could be more effective. Interestingly it also received a high number of action statements, (more statements than the number of teachers scoring 1 or 2). This suggests that feedback on this practice was also given to teachers who scored 3 and showed some effectiveness. While this is plausible, the feedback statements were fairly general and did not guide the teacher to excel in this area, so would be unsuitable for a teacher who is already demonstrating some competency. It could be that school leaders see this as an important practice area and were more likely to select it for feedback, including for teachers demonstrating some competency.

Most focus within this practice was on enabling girls to participate more equally in the lesson and not showing a bias for boys' participation. To excel in this practice area, school leaders should also guide teachers to challenge gender stereotypes. This concept was not well understood in the training, and there are no references to stereotypes in the evidence notes or feedback statements. **It would be useful to provide more guidance to observers on what it means to challenge negative stereotypes and what it looks like in the classroom.**

The teacher sets clear behavioral expectations for classroom activities

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.6	0	2	5	7	18	8

No action statements were given in relation to this practice. In the evidence notes there were some references to pupils behaving or not behaving in parts of the lesson.

To excel in this practice the rubric requires the teacher to set behaviour expectations throughout the lesson, for example guiding pupils on how to behave during activities. It could be the case that the pupils behave well without the teacher needing to do this, especially if the school leader is in the classroom observing. This makes this practice difficult to observe and improve.

To make this practice more valuable for professional development it could be useful to revisit the rubric descriptors and define low, medium and high behaviours that more accurately reflect secondary school classrooms in Sierra Leone. For example, it could include some emphasis on positive discipline strategies used when pupils are not behaving or classroom management strategies to prevent disruption. Alternatively select a different behaviour indicator from the TEACH tool: The teacher redirects misbehavior and focuses on an expected behavior, rather than the undesired behavior.

The teacher explicitly articulates the objectives of the lesson and relates classroom activities to the objectives

Total score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.7	6	2	5	10	8	15

Introducing a lesson with lesson objectives appears to be well understood by school leaders and practiced by most teachers. Findings show school leaders recognise when the teacher is not using clear and relevant lesson objectives at the start of the lesson. To excel in this area, all lesson activities should be clearly related to the objective. This element received less attention in the evidence notes and action statements. Only one feedback statement makes reference to this:

“I suggest in your next lesson, you should state the objectives , explain it well and relate it to classroom activities”.

This element could be emphasised with a practical example during training so school leaders look at whether activities are aligned to a specific lesson objective.

The teacher uses questions, prompts or other strategies to determine students’ level of understanding

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.6	9	6	3	5	16	11

9 teachers were scored at the lower end of this practice, which whilst small, is a higher number than seen in other practice areas. This aligns with the relatively high number of action statements related to this practice. A detailed analysis of the feedback statements is provided in the section above.

To excel in this practice teachers need to use questioning to determine pupil's understanding. Feedback to teachers should deepen to guide them on how to ask effective open questions as well as helping them think through whether the responses demonstrated understanding, or not, and what they do next to support learning. **This is a more complex practice, that can be difficult to observe accurately whilst observing other indicators and might be more challenging to capture succinctly in the form. It could be useful to conduct some lesson observations that just look at this one teaching practice.**

The teacher monitors most students during independent/group work

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.8	12	5	3	6	9	17

This practice received the most action statements and feedback was commonly asking teachers to move around the room and monitor group work.

The findings suggest that teachers scoring 3 or more were given feedback to improve this practice. To help teachers who already practice this to improve even further, feedback should move from simply telling teachers to move around the classroom and monitor all learners, to guiding teachers on how to monitor all pupils in a systematic way. This may be challenging in large, crowded classrooms. Feedback should also include guidance on what the teacher can do to monitor student's work – e.g. listen to discussions, mark work, clarify concepts or ask questions. These are described in the tool's rubric, **helping observers familiarise with the rubric will add value.**

The teacher adjusts teaching to the level of the children

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
4.0	1	1	2	7	15	15

Teachers were mostly observed doing this practice effectively, it is one of the higher scoring practice areas. There were also few action statements relating to this suggesting it was not a priority area for improvement.

The observation notes suggest that school leaders are scoring this practice high if the teacher uses clear explanations, simple language, provide additional explanation in Krio, or use visual aids. For example:

- *Observation note for a score of 5: He used some examples during the introduction of the topic to the level of the children. (28)*
- *Observation note for a score of 4: He did adjust the teaching to the level of the children but at some points moved above the level of the kids in his explanation. (8)*

Explaining a concept in a different way is one way to adjust teaching and help pupils learn. However, adjusting teaching to the level of the students also involves changing what is learned, for example going back in the topic to clarify concepts or providing more challenging work for pupils that have an advanced understanding. This might include adjusting for everybody or for a few or one student. There is no evidence of teachers doing this as would be expected for teachers scoring high in this practice. **This suggests this practice is not fully understood and observers would benefit from more guidance on what good looks like, perhaps through video demonstrations.**

The teacher provides specific comments or prompts that help clarify student misunderstandings.

Total score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.6	0	2	3	12	15	8

There is limited useful information on this practice area. Scoring of teachers is more centred around the middle score, as compared to other practices. There were no action statements related to this practice. This suggests it is deemed less important or perhaps less well understood by school leaders.

The evidence notes don't provide any insight into this indicator. Some school leaders make reference providing clear explanations but they are not specifically related to addressing misconceptions in learning.

This teaching practice is not included in the primary lesson observation tool. It could be removed to allow more focus and development in other areas.

The teacher provides thinking tasks and students perform thinking tasks

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.7	5	5	4	5	12	14
3.5		7	2	8	9	14

These two practices are grouped together for the purpose of analysis. Broadly the findings suggest that teachers are providing some thinking tasks but students are not always able to complete the thinking tasks, for reasons including they are too complicated or not well explained.

Scoring varies despite the observation notes being similar, as shown in the examples below.

- *The pupils explain their thinking tasks to the teacher but she did not explain or answer them. (4) [Score 5 Thinking Tasks]*
- *Most pupils try to explain the thinking tasks although not exactly. (18) [Score 4 Thinking Tasks]*

- *Teacher gave pupils a thinking tasks but not complex and failed to use a teaching Aid for pupils to better understand the concept taught (5) [Score 3 Thinking Tasks]*

To excel in this area teachers should provide thinking tasks that require students to identify patterns, make predictions, make connections, interpret information. They require learners to explore concepts the teacher has not yet explained. Not every individual or group task is a thinking task. There are no descriptions in the evidence notes about the thinking tasks that were provided in the lesson or what the pupils were doing to show this was a thinking task.

This concept was new to most school leaders during training and could warrant further training to understand examples of thinking tasks, perhaps through videos.

Students explain their thinking to the teacher or ask open ended questions

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
3.4	2	4	7	8	12	10

This practice is the lowest scoring practice. It is slightly different type of practice as the focus is on pupil behaviour. It is interesting to see that both pupil behaviours score relatively low.

This practice links to the practice about asking questions to determine pupils level of understanding. It highlights the importance of listening to pupils responses when asking questions to determine their understanding.

The teacher acknowledges students' efforts

Average score on forms	Number of action statements	Total forms scoring 1	Total forms scoring 2	Total forms scoring 3	Total forms scoring 4	Total forms scoring 5
4.1	2	3	0	6	12	19

This practice received the highest overall score, suggesting that it is the practice most teachers can perform competently.

The evidence notes and action statements accurately described this practice as giving praise and acknowledging views.

- *“Accept the views of the children even though some views are not correct, but you are to correct them”*
- *“He must try to encourage students efforts by praising them”*

The scoring and evidence related to this practice doesn't add anything meaningful to teacher professional development as, whilst important, it is similar to the practice of using positive language. If the TSC aims to simplify the form, **this practice area could be omitted.**