

# The Use of an Observation Proforma during a School-based Physical Activity Programme: Exploring the Researchers' Insights

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## Abstract

This research paper aims to present an observation proforma; a qualitative research tool used to evaluate a daily physical activity (PA) programme initiated in primary schools as part of a national pilot project in Malta. The observation proforma, grounded in an inquisitive approach, enabled the researchers to observe, document data, and engage in a comparative analysis exercise within the context of an ethnographic study. Simultaneously, this paper aims to explore the development process of the observation proforma by a group of researchers to contribute to qualitative academic literature. An online questionnaire was used as a self-reflection technique for the researchers to examine and reflect upon the use of the proforma. Findings revealed that the developmental phase of the proforma was instrumental, fostering discussions among researchers and refining it for specific research goals. Feedback from the researchers indicated that the proforma aligned effectively with the overarching research objectives and was described as a well-structured prompt, offering both autonomy and a platform for insightful reflections. This paper underscores the significance of the proforma as a versatile tool, offering a structured yet autonomous framework for qualitative analysis within the context of PA initiatives such as the one underpinning this research study; Fun Fit 5.

**Keywords:** field research, Fun Fit 5, non-participant observation, observation methodology literature, observation proforma, physical activity programme, qualitative research

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## 1. Introduction

The literature within the field of sports sciences denotes that qualitative information is typically derived from three primary forms of data collection, namely, “observing, interviewing and examining documents” (Tenenbaum and Driscoll, 2005, p.581). These methods represent various facets of field research, with ‘observations’ being articulated in the literature as a concept encompassing the systematic examination of individuals, their immediate environmental context, and the dynamic interplay between these elements. This approach to data collection involves some form of engagement within the field being studied and allows researchers to witness a selection of dynamics through firsthand experience (Flick, 2009). Tenenbaum and Driscoll (2005) include an additional factor to the latter assertion and describe the aim of observations “as a means to render a description of what is going on in that setting without unduly influencing what is being studied” (p.581). Creswell and Creswell (2018) offer a different dimension towards defining qualitative observation and reference field note-taking as part of the observation process, whereby the researcher takes unstructured or semi-structured field notes on the observed individuals at the research site. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), such observations can relate to the activities being implemented as well as the individual’s behaviour.

A deeper understanding of observations indicates that these may vary in multiple ways. As outlined by Flick (2009), observations can be covert or overt, non-participant or participant, systematic or unsystematic, can take place in natural or artificial situations, and can be of a self-observation nature or involve the observation of others. The latter type of observation resonates with the concept of having an observer who is a “professional stranger” and thus is accepted by the subjects being observed but remains at a distance; therefore, the researcher refrains from interventions in the field (Flick, 2009). Another distinguished characteristic outlined in Flick’s (2009) work relates to the position of the researcher, where he suggests four roles: the stranger, the visitor, the insider, and the initiate. Cohen et al. (2010) have classified and structured the typology presented by Flick (2009) to include the role of a detached observer, an observer as a participant, a participant as an observer, and a complete participant.

Within the context of the research study delineated in this paper, the researchers implemented a total of thirty-two non-participant and unobtrusive observations during eight PA sessions. Subsequently, this type of observation was chosen to avoid influencing the setting. In addition, these observations were executed within the natural field and were characterised by a semi-structured and overt nature. To carry out several observations within schools, the researchers created an observation proforma, which is also being presented in this paper. The proforma was used to provide detailed descriptive notes whilst supporting Tenenbaum and Driscoll’s (2005) assertion that through such data collection means, factual and comprehensive information about the physical

settings, participants, dialogues, activities, and behaviours are recorded. This paper looks at extenuating the researchers' insights on the proforma used and shall provide a chronological description of how this was developed, discussed, and amended to align with the main research objectives. The subsequent section shall provide a comprehensive explanation of the context of this research study, as the use of the observation proforma occurred within the parameters of a more extensive, overarching research study.

## 2. The Context of the Research Study

The observation proforma referred to in this research paper was designed and utilised throughout the 2022-2023 scholastic year. Through a collaboration between the Institute of Community Services at Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and a team from the Malta Football Association, the aforementioned year witnessed the launch and implementation of a PA programme and research study at three government primary schools across Malta. This programme and research study was christened 'Fun Fit 5'. As the name extenuates, the programme offered 'fun' and 'fit' physical activities implemented daily, hence '5', from Monday to Friday. The programme sought to introduce children to a diverse array of movement and motor skills, thereby fostering the advancement of physical literacy in their development.

Whilst the sessions were implemented by coaches employed by the Malta Football Association, the research design was designed by four researchers, two of whom specialise in the field of sports and another two specialising in early years education. The overarching research design included the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data. It addressed one main research question: In what ways, if any, does a daily PA project in primary schools throughout Malta affect the children's academic, physical, and well-being domains? As Figure 1 portrays, data were gathered throughout three phases within an extensive, controlled experimental design framework: i) the preliminary stage, ii) the intermediary and implementation stage and iii) the evaluation stage.

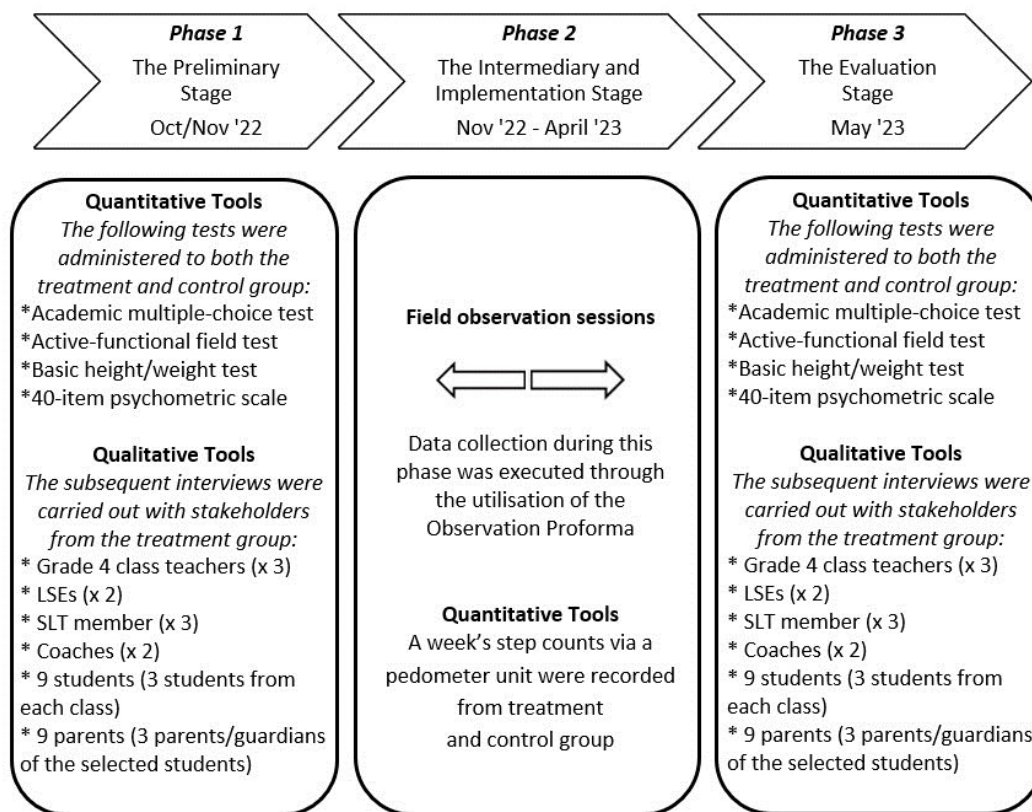


Figure 1: The Overarching Research Design

Quantitative data were collected to test the main experimental hypotheses guiding the study, and this included pre- and post-treatment testing across treatment and control groups on three main domains: academic/cognitive, physical, and wellness outcomes. In each of the three schools, two Grade four classes were assigned either the treatment group or the control group, with the first group conducting daily PA. In contrast, the latter saw to their usual routine, thus, one physical education lesson per week.

The academic outcome was measured using a bespoke multiple-choice test encompassing the subjects of Maltese, English, Mathematics, and Science. This test was developed using a pool of questions sourced from

past papers and other relevant materials such as textbooks and randomised across pre- and post-test conditions. Additionally, the test was augmented with a set of abstract, spatial, and logical reasoning items to incorporate the cognitive dimension. Standardised and validated active field tests and an anthropometric assessment of height and weight were employed to measure physical outcomes. In addition, quantitative data were also collected via pedometer units, which recorded a week's step counts from students in the treatment and control groups during and outside school hours. The wellness outcomes were evaluated using an established psychometric scale comprising not more than 40 Likert-type items. This scale has been previously validated for its accuracy in assessing wellness parameters.

Qualitative data were acquired through three distinct methods. Semi-structured interviews, adhering to an interview guide, were used to elicit insights from a selected number of educators, namely primary school teachers, learning support educators, members of the senior leadership team, and the coaches delivering the sessions. Focus group interviews following a focus group guide were implemented to gather data from the students and the parents or legal guardians. Whilst these two methodologies were used in the first and last phases, during the second phase, field observations were conducted to understand the nature of the PA programme being conducted. In total, the proforma was used during eight PA sessions, which took place during the months of January, February, March, and April 2023.

### **3. Research Aims and Objectives**

In light of the outlined context of the study, it is imperative to highlight that this research study stems from a more comprehensive research methodological design. Given this call, this paper will not explicitly present the data gathered from the overarching research study or observations. The objective is to introduce the tool utilised, thereby contributing to the literature of research tools in the context of PA and field observations. In addition to this scope, this paper aims to share the insights of the researchers regarding the said instrument. It aims at giving a thorough description of its design and how it was amended to align with the research questions. Subsequently, the main research questions underpinning this study are:

- i) Does the proforma effectively capture all the necessary information for a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the PA sessions?
- ii) What are the researchers' insights regarding the observation proforma's clarity, comprehensibility, and practicality?

The section which follows explains the research methodology and provides an account of the chronological sequence that guided the progression of this research endeavour, commencing with the initial formulation of the proforma and culminating in the development of a more refined template.

### **4. Methodology and the Development Process of the Proforma**

#### *4.1 The Development Process and the Presentation of the Observation Proforma Tool*

Scholars have highlighted diverse recording methods within the domain of observational research tools. These include video recording and written approaches through coding systems, which may consist of checklists and category systems (Robson, 2003). To customise the research methodology to the requirements of the study, the researchers aimed to develop a research tool that enabled them to have some form of communal ground yet allowed them the autonomy to record relevant findings. A preliminary version of the proforma was formulated by one of the researchers. This was based on a previously established observation methodology, which was used by the same researcher throughout a doctoral research study (Darmanin, 2017) and which was, in turn, grounded on Spradley's (1980) checklist of field notes. This checklist primarily targets the components central to observational field notes: space, actors, activities, time, goals and feelings. Following this grounded understanding in creating the preliminary version of the proforma, the team provided input and recommendations, leading to revisions. The observation proforma was utilised as a tool for data collection during the second phase of the research study, and feedback regarding its use in the field was obtained at the end of the research study. Figure 2 presents the final version of the used proforma. This is followed by a thorough rationale for the segments created and an analysis of the researchers' reflections.

### Section A

Date	Time	Duration	Term	Observation number
Location	Area	Name/s of coaches	Number of students	Other staff members
Researcher's Name				
Peer Researcher's Name (if applicable)				
Learning Outcome				

### Section B

Objective Field Notes	Interpretative Field Notes

### Section C

	Objective Observations	Interpretive Observations
General feeling/mood of the session		
Peer interaction		
Level of engagement		
Group management		
Activity pace and pitch		
Time on task (can be quantified)		
Cross-curricular implementations (concerning skills pertaining to the physical, academic, and wellness domains)		
Awareness of individual needs and inclusivity		
Learning feedback provided by learners		
The approach/instructional model applied by coaches		

### Section D

Anecdotal notes	
Further observations	

Figure 2: The Observation Proforma developed by the FF5 Research Team<sup>1</sup>

The researchers focused on creating a proforma grounded in an inquisitive approach, a term that is often linked to epistemic curiosity. The coding system adopted in the template was initially developed based on Wh-questions, which in turn addressed an interrogative approach to acquiring information. The standard model of observation adopted reflects the one used within the journalism realm to understand and report upon the context of a story (Tenenbaum and Driscoll, 2005). Following is a selective list of questions that were drafted before the development of the proforma and which served as a foundational frame:

- i) *When*: When did the sessions take place?
- ii) *Where*: Where were the sessions conducted?
- iii) *Which*: Which area of the school ground was utilised? Which learning components were addressed during the session? Which anecdotal quotes were particular or relevant at the point of observation? Which equipment was used during the sessions? Which subjects or concepts were integrated into the sessions? Which instructional strategies did the coaches use during the sessions?
- iv) *What*: What were the learning intentions? What was the general feeling expressed throughout the session? What kind of interactions were observed among the students? What aspects of the session seemed to engage the students the most? What measures were taken to accommodate the students' diverse needs?
- v) *Who*: Who instructed the sessions? Who was engaged in the sessions? Who did the students interact with during the session? Who was responsible for managing the group during the session?
- vi) *Why*: Why did the coaches make such decisions? Why did the students react the way they did?

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Darmanin, M., Kerr-Cumbo, R., Muscat Ingrott, M., & Schembri, H. (2023). The Use of an Observation Proforma during a School-based Physical Activity Programme: Exploring the Researchers' Insights, *Journal of Education and Practice*, 14 (32), p.1-9. DOI:10.7176/JEP/14-32-01. For any inquiries or permissions beyond the scope outlined above, please contact the corresponding author.

vii) *How*: How long were the sessions? How long was each activity? How long did students wait before their turn? How many students attended? How did the students feel and react during the sessions? How were the activity pace and pitch described? How did the activities capture the students' attention? How did the coaches manage any challenging behaviour within the group? How did the coaches ensure that the activities were appropriate for the students' abilities? How were all students included? How did the students express their understanding of the skills tackled in the session?

The formation of the questions served as an exercise to provide a plan, which helped with the formation of the proforma. This exercise also ensured that the researchers listed the main components that needed to be addressed during the field observations. This process also facilitated the comparative analysis exercise which took place at the end of the research study. It further allowed the researchers to segment the questions into four main sections, as evident in Figure 2 and ensure that the observations were conducted in a multidimensional manner. This aligns with Flick's (2009) definition of non-participant observation, which extenuates that practically all the senses; seeing, hearing, feeling, and smelling, are integrated into the observation processes.

Section A of the proforma focuses on the recording of contextual and demographic factors, and this information was recorded for reference purposes. The second section, Section B, is based on field note-taking. The development of the proforma was instigated by the need to record observations qualitatively. Section B provided the researchers with a space to record objective and interpretative observations. The latter included the researchers' reflexive thoughts that reflect those outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018): "speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices" (p.190). A brief example of this work is presented in an extract sample in Figure 3. The main scope behind the presentation of this figure is to present a visual example of how this was used in practice.

Objective Field Notes	Interpretive Field Notes
<p><b>9:30 am</b> The session commenced with an initial warm-up, wherein students jogged on the spot. Whilst most students did actually jog on the spot, three students were observed testing boundaries and jogging in the vicinities.</p> <p><b>9.33 am</b> One of the coaches divided the students into pairs; students were divided by sex. There were eighteen students in total, and it was observed that four students came from a different class due to their class teacher being sick. The coaches continued explaining that a specific colour would be called, prompting the students to run and touch the designated colour. At a certain juncture, an element of unpredictability was introduced with the instruction to touch the opposite of the announced colour.</p>	<p>It was evident that the Grade four class and the coaches did not mind having other students join the session. The other students seemed happy and pleased to join the class.</p> <p>The reason behind the practice of grouping children by sex was not clear; it is essential to consider the potential implications of such groupings.</p> <p>The incorporation of an enjoyable component in the session resonated well with the students. It is evident that the coaches' animated delivery significantly contributed to the positive ambience of the setting.</p> <p>Facial expressions of the students revealed a high level of enjoyment and enthusiasm through the first two activities conducted.</p>

Figure 3: An Observational Extract from a Recorded Session

The same format transpired in Section C, which features a set of ten central components aligned with the focus of the observations and the WH questions outlined. Initially, the proforma presented seven components, but following feedback from the team members, these were amended to include ten. Subsequently, Section D allowed the researchers to document any anecdotal quotes that struck them as being particular or relevant, as well as further observations.

During the course of the observations, the researchers did not feel the need to amend the proforma in any way since it addressed the main purpose, that of having a skeleton plan that indicates the aspects that needed to be observed. It was also mutually agreed that during the actual observation of sessions, the researchers must keep themselves at a distance and not obstruct the research setup. The chronological phases adopted in the second phase align with those presented by Flick (2009). The researchers selected the setting to be observed, standardised focus through the collective use of one proforma and provided descriptive observations that provided a general presentation of the observed field. They also selected observations that were intended to purposively grasp central aspects, and observations ended when the theoretical saturation was reached, and thus, there was a representative sample of observations.

Before entering the field, it was agreed between the researchers that the proforma was to be used to record data. Therefore, all team members did not necessarily fill in each section except for Section A. Prior to the field observations, it was also agreed that gathered data were not to be shared or discussed to avoid the danger of introducing bias and imprecise representations and in an attempt to prevent reactivity. Additionally, the

researchers opted to observe the PA sessions from different standpoints, including a bird's and a worm's-eye view, an ideology often referred to in the art and photography literature but was also adopted within the field of observations.

As previously highlighted, an online questionnaire was later shared with the team to mitigate the influence among team members and ensure that external factors kept the collected data uninfluenced. The objective was to gather insights concerning the use of the proforma. The following section expounds upon the development and rationale behind selecting this tool.

#### *4.2 The Use of an Online Questionnaire as a Self-reflection Tool*

The designed questionnaire followed an exploratory nature, and the team members were required to answer a set of eighteen open-ended questions. The questions were specifically chosen to address two aims: to ensure that the research question is explored in depth and that the researchers are given the right space and opportunity to elaborate on their frame of thoughts and insights about using the proforma. Particular attention was given to the actual wording of the questions. Robson's (2003) checklist was mainly used as a guideline. Amongst the list provided, it was ensured that double-barrelled questions were avoided to ensure focus and that the answers fully reflected the component being addressed. Attention was also given to ensure that the questions meant the same thing to all respondents. This was addressed by providing definitions of the key and technical terms used. Some of the questions were also referenced to give a consolidated background to the statements made.

The questionnaire was divided into four main sections: i) experience in observational research, ii) template usability, iii) proforma use in the field, and iv) final reflections. The first section addressed questions about the researchers' experiences in observational research, initial impressions of the proforma, and thoughts about the feedback process adopted in the initial stages of this study. The subsequent section addressed the use of the template in terms of clarity, comprehensibility, practicality, and whether it aligned with the research questions of the overarching study. Benefits, challenges, and limitation insights were shared in the third section of the questionnaire, while the final section enabled the researchers to share their thoughts about the standpoints taken during the observation sessions and any additional elements and data points that the researchers felt they needed to share.

The main sections that constituted the questionnaire facilitated the analysis process as this occurred in a pre-structured manner. Data were therefore addressed and presented within predetermined sections to ensure a systematic analysis process and to enable a consistent framework for interpreting and presenting data, ensuring facilitated comparability processes. The latter component contributed to the 3 C's which predominantly lie within the choice of data analysis: i) comparability, ii) consistency and iii) clarity. Pre-structuring questions facilitated the comparison process as contrasts and similarities lay within the same section. This, in turn, ensured consistency and uniformity in the interpretation of data, ensuring that all insights and components were tackled effectively and, therefore, presented within a clear, comprehensible framework. Additionally, the lead researcher took measures to ensure the constructed questionnaire was completed before the other team members shared their own insights. This precautionary step was taken to ensure that the responses were not influenced by those of others.

## **5. Findings and Discussion**

### *5.1 The Researchers' Experiences and Their Implications on the Research Process*

The researchers who developed the observation proforma work within the field of sports education and early childhood education, two sectors that brought the researchers together to work on a conjunct research project. All researchers have had varying forms of experience in using observational techniques. One of the researchers reported on the involvement of in-class observational sessions for doctoral research purposes, while another argued that observations were conducted within the context of observing participants during a series of focus group interviews. Within the sports domain, one of the researchers extenuated that previous experience of observing the field involved using checklists with achieved/not achieved or graded criteria within the context of exercise kinematics, observing body movements and positions. Within the same domain, other observations were conducted by one of the researchers whilst carrying the role of a football coach and teacher. Additionally, all researchers have previously supervised students who embarked on observational techniques.

The researchers' experiences and different lines of expertise in their respective fields brought varying insights into what was worth recording and observing during the PA sessions. Section C of the proforma was initially presented with seven main observational features, but following the initial feedback, it was evident that each researcher's expertise was infused and reflected in the content of the proforma. For instance, one of the researchers included "time on task" as a needed requirement for observation and added features related to pedagogy. Similarly, another researcher highlighted the need for "inclusivity", which ultimately reflects upon his line of work within the inclusive education sphere. Gathered insights have suggested that the researchers' prior expertise and experiences were bound to affect the formation of the observation proforma as a methodological

tool. This was not only evident in the formation of the proforma itself but also when the proforma was utilised in the context of the PA sessions. Whilst the methodological tool was initially formulated with the scope of gathering qualitative data, some researchers resorted to quantitative and visual means of data recording. For instance, one of the researchers instantaneously recorded time on task versus rest ratios, while another opted to document the students' race formations through drawings rather than qualitatively. The quotation presented below further extenuates upon the agreeing factor that the researchers' personal experiences were a positive factor in shaping the type and influence of the observations made:

I would say they (experiences) are the only factor influencing my observations. I was only able to note aspects of the lessons I am able and competent to recognise. I was overly sensitive to the structure of the sessions and the pedagogy of the coaches, given my prior knowledge in physical education. It was challenging to take that cap off. I was also sensitive to the observable anthropometry, physiology, and biomechanics of children, also a cap that was difficult to take off.

Similarly, another researcher elaborated on the fact that one's own experiences are inevitable to ignore, and whilst the researchers argued that they were sensitive towards "experience bias", this component was further challenged by one of the researchers and was in turn referred to as a positive feature. Data indicated that all researchers extenuated in depth upon their experiences and their implications on the research process. Similar to the outlined quotations, for example, one of the researchers explained that in light of previous extensive experience in narrative analysis, emphasis on field conversational discourse between students, educators, and coaches was explicitly reported.

Findings indicate that the intersection of the researchers' backgrounds contributed positively to the research process, a component that was described as essential to enrich the overall analysis. This, in turn, provided a more insightful and dynamic understanding of the context and subjects being observed and aligned with the rationale behind the positionality of the researchers in the field. This understanding was possible since four researchers conducted observations within the same area. Literature extenuates that any number of researchers can conduct observational research. This ultimately depends on varying factors. In the context of this research study, having a team of multiple researchers ensured a multidimensional component towards understanding the context being researched.

### *5.2 Template Usability: Clarity, Comprehensibility and Practicality*

Findings about initial impressions and thoughts of the observation proforma were gathered through the use of the questionnaire, and these were mostly aligned in terms of perspectives. Two of the researchers instantly liked the proforma since it is well structured and served as a "guideline" whilst it provided the researchers with a "better understanding of what to look for". An element of scepticism was elaborated by two of the researchers who argued that, at first, they were concerned that the proforma would rigidise and compartmentalise the data collection process as it would "kill the freedom of expression". This perception changed once the proforma was used. As one of the researchers argued,

My initial reaction was that it was very structured, so I was unsure as to the degree of subjectivity to exercise in terms of what I might have felt was important in my observations, given the qualitative nature of the methodology. However, upon using the proforma, I noted that such flexibility was built into the form, and of course, not all fields needed to be filled. I found it comfortable to use the fields as prompts.

A mutual agreement was shared about the feedback process, which was instigated at the beginning of the observations. All researchers commented upon the "refinement of the proforma", which was only possible after each research team member was asked to share feedback, with one researcher arguing: "understanding each tool's function ensures a clear picture of the overall research process. This way, everyone is on the same page and can navigate the research landscape effectively". The gathered insights indicated that all researchers believe that sharing feedback on the proforma was vitally instrumental.

Varying insights were shared about how the proforma scored in terms of clarity, comprehensibility, and practicality. All of the researchers suggested that the proforma is well segmented. Yet, one of the researchers proposed a balance between "a guidebook structure", which allows for a better understanding of the terms whilst presenting fewer criteria. This is to ensure that the proforma allows for relative flexibility. A similar remark was shared by another researcher who explained that the main section (presented as Section B in Figure 2) was the most useful from a practical standpoint, whereas Section C was mostly left unfilled. In terms of practicality, the proforma allowed the researchers to present data in varying multidimensional ways, including text, written or typed, drawings as well as visually, through photos and videos. It was interesting to observe that the researchers adopted different ways of recording their data, with some choosing to type their observations whilst others wrote down notes and elaborated at a later stage. Whilst all recording styles were unique and worked best for each of the researchers, one of the researchers suggested a ticking system, specifically for Section A and Section C. This might have facilitated the recording processes without "killing" the spontaneous insights perceived during the

recording of interpretive field note-taking.

While varying insights were shared regarding which sections were the most significant, aligned responses were recorded regarding how the proforma aligns with the research objectives. There was a consensual agreement that the proforma itself did align with the research questions, with one of the researchers commenting that “they align simply because the process of building the proforma and delineating the scope of the overall study were mutual processes. I, for one, was prompted to reflect more deeply about the study upon looking at the drafted proforma”. An added point was presented by another researcher who extenuated that the proforma not only aligned well with the research questions but also allowed different field experts to observe the phenomenon in different ways. This vital component calls for deep analysis.

In sum, while initial concerns were expressed about the proforma’s potential to limit subjective observations, findings indicated that, ultimately, the proforma encouraged flexibility. Although one of the researchers suggested a more balanced structure and a simpler criteria framework, the team acknowledged that the proforma accommodates various recording styles. A consensual agreement that the proforma could be utilised as each individual deemed fit was appreciated by all the researchers involved.

### *5.3 Proforma Use in the Field: Benefits and Challenges*

Gathering insights about the proforma at the end of the data collection process was beneficial since feedback was gathered after the development process and following its use. A benefit that was elaborated upon by all researchers related to “autonomy”. It was noted that all researchers opted to use the proforma in their unique way, and the concept of “freedom” was particularly appreciated by all team members, with one commenting that “the proforma gave me structure – it felt like a well-framed tool for me to apply a better ‘scientific’ eye through my observations. Yet it allowed me the freedom to apply my insights within that – autonomy.”

Another component that the researchers regarded as a benefit related to the different standpoints taken in the field being observed. Observations were taken from a dimensional perspective, with researchers at the ground and higher levels. The researchers reported that this was beneficial as it offered different perspectives and enabled researchers to capture “blind spot moments” that could have gone unnoticed, thus enriching the overall understanding of the context. A recommendation that was commented upon by two of the researchers pertained to the idea of implementing rotational dynamics whereby the researchers could have rotated and switched places even more, perhaps even mid-session, to maximise what they could see and hear.

Another benefit all researchers commented upon was the way the proforma is segmented, with each part addressing different yet linked components. One of the researchers regarded the form as practical and useful as it served as a reminder to record certain vital information, such as those outlined in Section A. Additionally, three researchers commented upon the practical way Sections B, C, and D are presented, with Section B being described as the “preferred” and “most liked”. The sections that required the researchers to record objective and interpretive notes were described as the most practical since these “handheld the researcher not to venture into the unknown and ensured thorough and more accurate observations as a group”. This practical component was further described as allowing “both autonomy and structure”. Additionally, one of the researchers explained that it was a challenge to fill in the fields in Section C “since one needs to use it multiple times to get used to the sections”. This, in turn, was the main reason why Section B offered more flexibility and Section C was mainly used by one of the researchers to cross-reference during the writing in Section B. This reflects upon the recommendation that two of the researchers shared, that of presenting a simple yet concise guide, guidelines, or a guidebook structure that explains each section to be applied with better understanding, which in turn would make it a “stronger tool”. One of the researchers elaborated that “this can be implemented, for example, by having a clear guidance of what each section means, along with a ‘disclaimer’ at the end in bold, showing that it can be applied with relative flexibility”.

Another challenge related to a personal organisation factor, with one of the researchers presenting a valid argument of having “a prompt at the top of a blank page with two observation-interpretation (Section B) boxes so that one could print multiple copies of that page and file away on completion”. This was a challenge to one of the researchers as disparate notes became challenging to keep organised, especially given the extended period over which the multiple observations occurred. Another recommendation, which also tackles a personal preference, relates to the function of having tickable options, which would enhance the proforma’s utility and thus make the process more efficient and focused. This can be particularly implemented in the first section of the proforma, which ultimately requires researchers to present factual information.

### *5.4 Proforma Use in the Field: Limitations and Recommendations*

The findings reported in this research paper rely on the researchers’ self-reported data. Whilst attention was given to avoid subjective biases, the researchers shared insights on a research tool they devised, which might have influenced the assessment of the proforma’s efficacy. It can be argued that there was another envisioned limitation throughout this study, yet this was challenged. One of the researchers commented on possible varying



or contrasting interpretations of the observed PA sessions. While this was predicted as a potential limitation, data analysis revealed that the research team reported back upon aligned components. Therefore, the expected limitation was in practice transformed into a strength.

Following this research experience, these researchers recommend an enriched understanding by integrating a diversified research team. The research team involved in the outlined study had different backgrounds and perspectives and came from varying disciplines. This, in turn, was beneficial for a more holistic understanding of the dynamics under observation. It can also be noted that having a gender-mixed team can entice other benefits as these tend to be more sensitive to gender-related issues within the research context.

It is also recommended that in contexts similar to the one underpinning this research study, observational tools such as the proforma are used with additional data collection methodologies, thus through triangulation of data. The observation proforma within the research study outlined in this paper was used along with other tools, and this synergy proved successful. Implementing a training session or a workshop focusing on the strands presented in the proforma, along with clear guidelines for interpretation and application, is also recommended, as this fosters a more streamlined approach to data collection. The integration of visuals through the use of technological means such as photos could enhance the efficiency of the proforma, accommodating varying recording styles. The elements detailed in this section are closely tied to future recommendations for using the research tool. The observation proforma may prove beneficial for other researchers contemplating a similar approach, opening the door for a critical reflection on the tool by fellow scholars.

## 6. Summary and Conclusions

To sum up, the outlined findings indicated that the researchers' varied backgrounds led to the inclusion of specific features in the observation proforma. Despite initial concerns about the categories outlined in the proforma, the researchers found the proforma to encourage autonomy and accommodate various recording styles. Feedback on the proforma's usability indicated that it provided structure while allowing freedom in observations, with sections that addressed different but linked components. Varying views were reserved for Section C of the proforma, with two researchers suggesting a guidebook structure for better understanding, while another suggested adding the ten outlined criteria statements as prompts. Despite the challenges and limitations outlined, the research team agreed that the research proforma effectively aligned with the research objectives.

In light of the recommendations made by the team members, a consensual agreement was shared regarding the use of the proforma, with researchers claiming that they would recommend its use to other researchers in similar or varying research contexts. The data presented in this paper extenuated that a diverse team of observers with different backgrounds observing the same event and unified in vision by a single proforma provided an opportunity for deep qualitative insights. Mutually agreeing that not all sections were meant to be filled in was appreciated by all team members involved, as the proforma served as a prompt by suggesting factors to observe, leaving researchers free to focus on whatever stood out for them at any given moment in time. This was reflected not only in the content each researcher provided but also in the insights shared through the online questionnaire.

In conclusion, the insights outlined in this research paper primarily pertain to the application of the Fun Fit 5 PA programme within educational settings. However, the researchers' observations regarding the use and design of the observation proforma have been articulated to contribute to methodological literature. It is anticipated that the proforma and the accompanying insights will serve as a valuable guide and resource, informing other researchers in their potential adoption or adaptation of the proforma to suit their specific or diverse research endeavours.

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