



The Role Of ESP Teacher In The Age Of 21th Century Skills

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Received: 23/04/2024; Accepted : 17/06/2024 ; Published : 10/07/2024

Abstract

Due to technology and globalisation, the world has turned into a global village, resulting not only in a real mix of cultures, languages, and races but also in the booming of multinationals in every part of the world. This rapid increase in multinationals entailed the necessity of revisiting the way instruction is delivered in educational institutions to digital students whose interests and needs are different from their predecessors. Today's students are more inclined to use knowledge acquired in class in a particular field with a high mastery of interpersonal communication skills. The study aimed at finding out whether ESP teachers' instruction promoted 21st century skills and highlighting the importance of shifting to a new mode of teaching based on students' engagement in the teaching-learning process by adopting an integrative approach for students to see the link between different subjects and transcend any acquired knowledge in real life situations. The study used mixed methods research: qualitative and quantitative data collection, encompassing classroom observation, and a semi-structured interview. The findings revealed that the main problem with ESP teaching is that it is mostly theoretical and teacher-centred, with no chance for students to put into practice what they have learned.

Keywords: Differentiated instruction, independent learning, interdisciplinary teaching, teaching quality, 21st century skills.

1. Introduction

As ESP is an approach to language teaching based on students' needs (Hutchinson and Waters, 1994), teachers are required to design specific syllabuses and effective lesson plans in alignment with these needs. As a result, any acquired knowledge can be used in the field of study, and students are enabled to cope with real-life situations and face any challenges in their future workplace. Unfortunately, designing an ESP course, finding and/or adapting materials, and setting up a syllabus based on students' needs can be daunting and challenging for many ESP teachers (Belyaeva, 2015).

It is true that several ESP courses, under different names, have been injected into higher education. However, graduating university students' knowledge and competence as to what and how to teach an ESP course when they embark on a teaching career remain underdeveloped.

Therefore, to palliate any shortcomings as regards students' effective teaching provision, university teachers need themselves to be 21st century teachers, as today's workforce needs candidates who are proficient in communicating information, cooperating with peers, innovating, using technology, and solving problems, not degree holders.

2. Background of the Study

The rapid spread of information worldwide due to globalisation and technological advancements has given rise to a "digital native" generation (Savin, 2009), forcing educators, policymakers, researchers, and educational leaders to revisit the curricula, the methods and the way students are taught and assessed. Cho (2012) emphasised the importance for teachers to re-examine their teaching methods used in class and align them with the new demands of the 21st century by integrating in their lesson plans activities that promote critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving.

Brunton (2009) asserts that the emergence of ESP, as a result of global economy, has by itself imposed a break from the traditional way of teaching a language. Twenty-first-century students are different from their predecessors. They are more demanding. They want to learn how the information and knowledge acquired in class could be used in real-life situations to solve a problem, synthesise information, and communicate it to others both in written and verbal forms when they join the workforce.

3. Statement of the problem

According to the OECD (2009), up to this day, knowledge transmission is still imparted via textbooks, handouts and long lectures with students as passive agents. Despite its discrepancy with the requirements of the 21st century, such a mode of teaching still continues to reign in many of current classes (Papert, 1993).

Twenty-first-century students need to be provided with instruction that goes beyond the mastery of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They are enthusiastic about acquiring skills favoured by employers (Hasselbring et al., 1994). According to a study conducted by Wagner (2008), employers in their companies need individuals who are critical thinkers, can take the role of leaders, can take initiative, are proficient in oral and written communication, and access, synthesise and analyse information.

3.1. Aims of the study

The study also aimed to measure to what extent teachers are aware of their students' needs and interests and to what extent they are implementing strategies that would result in 21st century skills learning. It also aimed to highlight the challenges that ESP teachers encounter when teaching and assessing 21st century students in the absence of a definite syllabus, a lack of

training and professional development programmes prior to embarking on covering a given course.

3.2. Significance of the study

The traditional mode of teaching, in complete disconnection with 21st century students, has widened the gap between teachers' teaching practices and students' actual needs and resulted in their disengagement and demotivation. One way to narrow the gap is to shift from factual teaching to experiential teaching by implementing engaging, hands-on, extracurricular, interdisciplinary activities to promote effective communication, critical thinking, and problem solving.

Since no teacher is an island, policymakers, educational leaders at the highest sphere should endeavour to schedule continuous professional development programmes for both novice and experienced teachers if they wish to keep up with the new approaches, improve teaching quality, and be in harmony with the new generation of students.

3.2. Research questions

Based on the statement of the problem mentioned before, this study sought to address the following research questions:

- To what extent are ESP teachers familiar with the 21st century skills?
- How do ESP university students view their teachers' instruction?

The questions were addressed indirectly in a checklist designed by the researchers and used during the classroom observation sessions, and in semi-structured interviews with those who agreed to take part in the study during the academic year 2022-2023 in the English Department, Stambouli Mustapha.

4. Literature review

4.1. Defining ESP

There is a multitude of ESP definitions. The following have been retained:

- ESP is defined as "an approach" to language learning for a specific field and "not a product" (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, p. 19). The focus, then, is on teaching students to communicate within communities rather than focusing on teaching vocabulary and language rules in isolation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

- Mackay and Mountford (1978, p. 2) defined ESP as the teaching of English for "clearly utilitarian purposes."

- Dudley-Evans and Maggie St John (1998), ESP is concerned with preparing students to effectively communicate when assigned a task in their studies or in their workplace after graduation.

4.2. Roles of ESP Teachers:

The primary task of ESP teachers is to ensure that the content and goals of the course are clearly identified right from the outset as per the students' needs, as stated by Richards and Schmidt

(2010, p. 198). ESP teachers' roles have been embodied by Górska and Poręcka (2013) in the form of a process (see diagram 1):

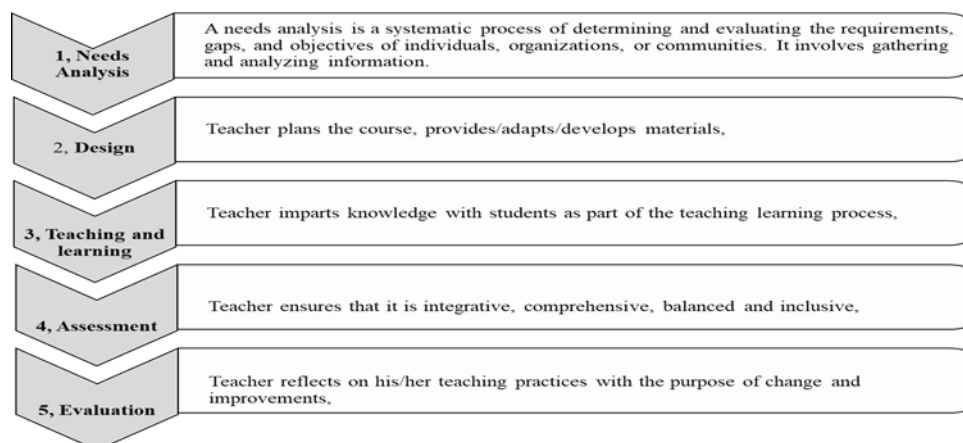


Diagram 1. Teachers' role in ESP Courses

In addition to the roles cited before, ESP teachers should possess three types of competences: language competence, pedagogic competence, and language awareness (see diagram 2 for details about ESP teachers' competences).

However, it is worthy to note that these roles cannot be properly performed unless appropriate tasks in alignment with modern education are implemented (see difference between traditional education and modern education in Appendix (A), hence the necessity for teachers to document themselves, do research and collaborate with colleagues – when possible, to acquire data about the subject.

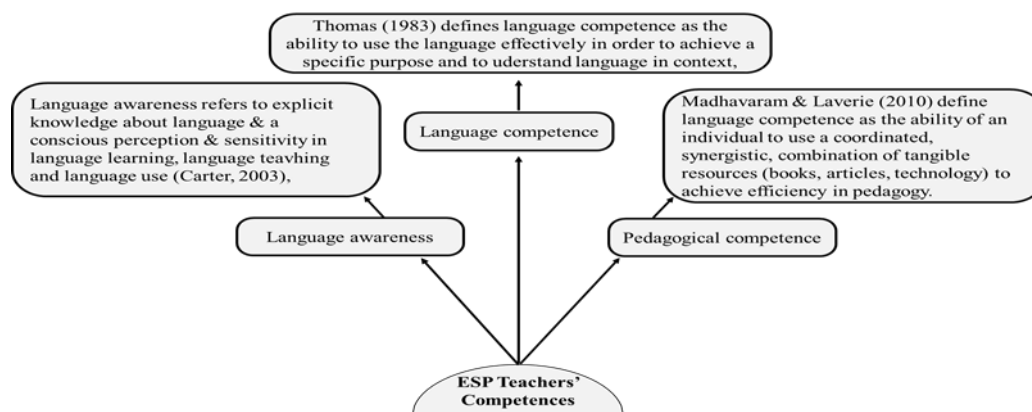


Diagram 2. ESP Teacher's Competences

4.3. The Challenges of ESP Teachers

When assigned an ESP course at the university level, teachers are faced with several challenges. Firstly, they are required to provide students with teaching quality that responds to the demands of the workforce (Kemendikbud, 2012a). Unfortunately, with no adequate training to teach ESP courses, proper syllabus and clear objectives, teaching a specialised subject can be an unsurmountable challenge. Secondly, meeting the new requirements of modern education constitutes another challenge for ESP teachers as they are not only in charge of covering the

course content but are also responsible for infusing the 21st century learning formula: 7Cs × 3Rs (see Diagram 3), into their lesson plans.

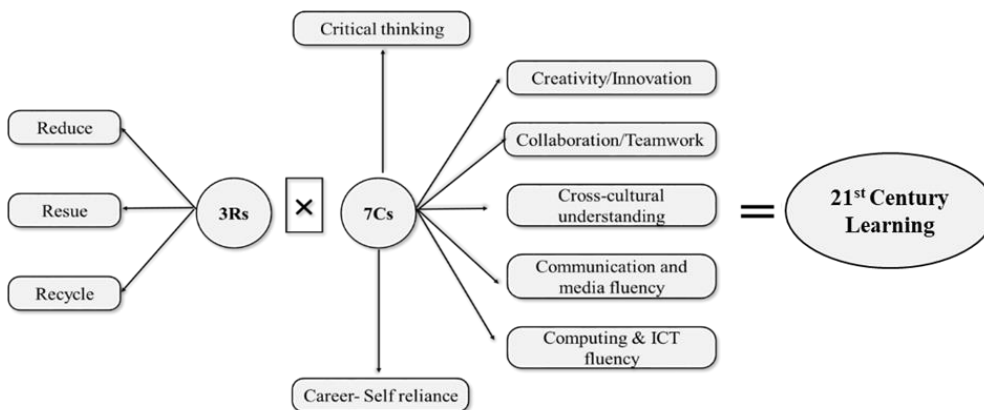


Diagram 3. The 21st Century Formula

The 21st century formula implies that today’s students need 21st century teachers who know how to use technology and implement extracurricular activities (Cuban 2003).

Thirdly, another challenge facing ESP teachers is how to support students’ learning during the assessment process. Assessment in modern education stresses the importance of using the two forms of assessment: formative and summative, with a focus on the achievements of the outcome(s) and the use of high-order thinking. In other words, the purpose of assessment is no longer based on grading but on leading the students from low order of thinking to high order of thinking (see diagram 4) through effective questioning and identifying the gaps between instruction and learning outcomes, revising teaching practices, and bringing changes to improve teaching quality.

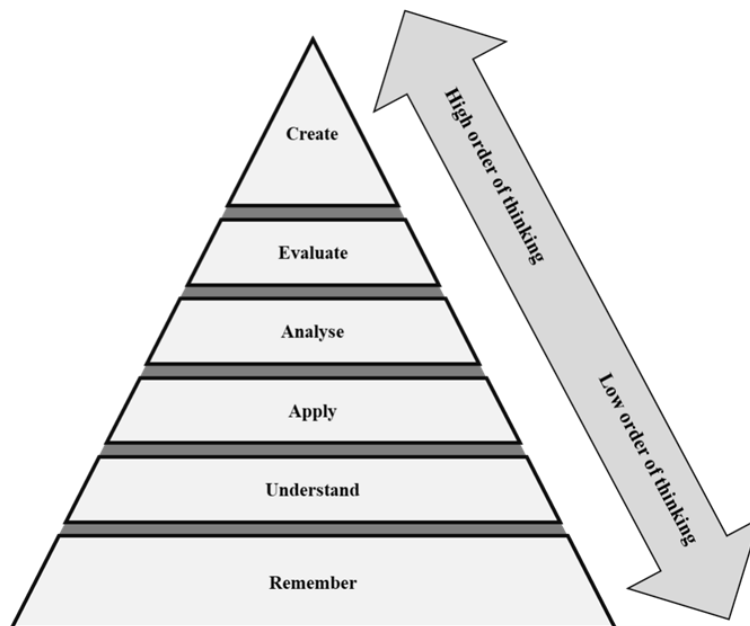


Diagram 4. Effective use of Questioning

As asserted by Yildirim (1996), using interdisciplinary approach during the assessment process can promote critical thinking, making students think outside the box, use the acquired knowledge in their lives, see the link between different subjects/courses and be fully engaged (see some examples of interdisciplinary themes in Appendix B). For example, if they are asked to write a report on the problem of marine debris in their coastal town, students will use their prior knowledge about the effect of trash on marine life in their community (what they actually see), and connect it to new knowledge when on site (types of trash, impact of plastic on marine life and humans, economic losses, etc.) or through research. As can be seen, the task is authentic and incorporates several subjects (using language to write a survey, using math to calculate the percentage of marine debris items, designing graphs, raising health or economic issues, writing a report, etc.). Such a curricular activity sets the foundation for students' autonomy and promotes teamwork, collaboration, and interpersonal communication skills (Black and Wiliam, 1998; OECD, 2005).

To obtain valid data regarding students' learning and support any future decisions as part of summative assessment, some principles highlighted in diagram 5 are to be taken into consideration when assessing 21st century students.

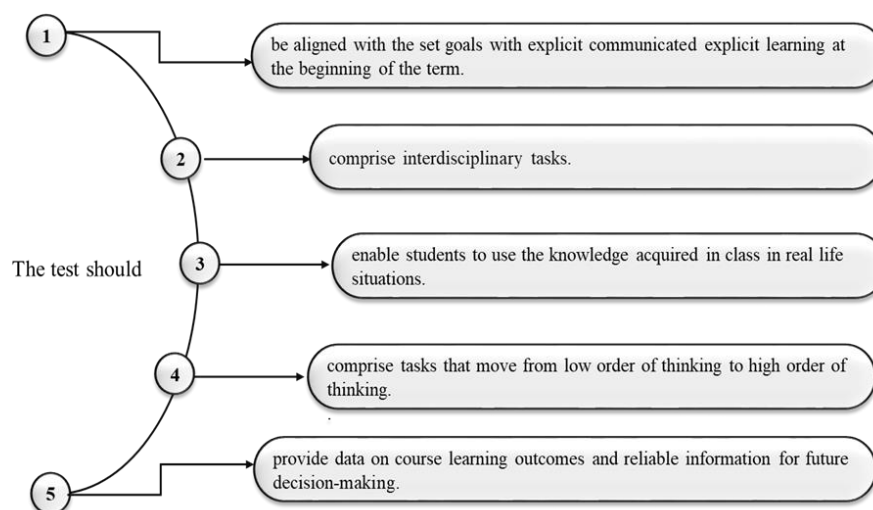


Diagram 5. Principles of a Test in Modern Education

If knowledge transmission via lectures and textbooks has become obsolete and inefficient, teachers should:

- see to it that their instruction be modified to meet their students' needs and in full harmony with the demands of 21st century (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012).
- be aware that a one-size-fits-all approach, wherein all the students are taught the same thing at the same pace in the same way can only but result in their disengagement and demotivation (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005).
- promote the 21st century skills by implementing interdisciplinary tasks

In imparting instruction based on students' learning styles, needs, interests, and backgrounds, teachers are certainly leading their students to use the language with a target partner in a specific field and face the challenges in real-life as stressed by Sweller (1988).

5. Methodology

5.1. Methods of research

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to address the research questions and find out about the type of instruction imparted to students in higher education and to what extent it affected learning. For the quantitative data, the researchers used a classroom observation checklist (see Appendix C), and a semi-structured interview to collect qualitative data (see Appendix D). The mixed-method approach aimed at corroborating the findings and interpretations during the classroom observation and the students' answers to the interview's questions.

5.2. The participants

Two ESP teachers were subjected to classroom observation, and out of the twenty students in the department of English who were invited to participate in individual interviews, only six agreed to take part in the study anonymously.

5.3. Data collection instruments and procedures

Two instruments were used to collect data: individual semi-structured interview and classroom observation session checklist. The collected data from the two instruments aimed at giving insights on the impact of teachers' practices in class and expectantly bringing answers to the research questions. The semi-structured interview was used to find out about the mode of instruction provided to students in the field of ESP. It was conducted in an informal way and in a stress-free environment, with the assurance that no name will appear in the paper. The ten questions used in individual interviews gave the students an opportunity to discuss their views related to learning after five years at university. The data were gathered through listening and note taking, with rare intervention on the part of the researchers. The ultimate aim of the interviews was to corroborate students' feedback with the researchers' classroom observation notes.

As for the data collected through observing classroom practices, the researchers attended two sessions at different intervals, took field notes and compared them to the answers provided in the interviews. The classroom observation checklist offered the advantage of gathering authentic data (teachers' performance/feedback, students' interests, motivation, types of questions asked, students' engagement, etc.) during instruction delivery and on site.

6. Data analysis

6.1. Classroom Observation Analysis

After attending the session and filling out the checklist, the researchers came to the realisation that, due to a lack of experience in teaching and awareness of the students' needs in modern

education, the provision of instruction was mainly delivered via handouts during the whole period, with teachers as the main agents of knowledge transmission. It was also noticed that most of the questions posed by the teachers did not promote a high order of thinking. Besides, whenever students were asked questions, they were not given ample time (wait time) to encode and decode information prior to answering. It would be unfair to demean teachers' efforts in trying to provide students with effective instruction; however, both the questions posed and the suggested activities did not promote active learning, and students were not fully engaged, resulting in boredom and demotivation.

6.2. Students' interview analysis

When interviewed, students admitted that their instructors were doing their best and appreciated their efforts; however, many of them thought that their instructors needed more training sessions to be able to impart effective instruction. They also hoped for a total change in delivery. When asked how instruction could be improved, students claimed they would favour to learn through project work, presentations, group-work and technology. Some of the interviewees stated that they knew some grammatical structures by heart but were unable to use them properly in their daily conversations or in writing, while others claimed they were more interested in using the language outside the class.

The results obtained from the interviews revealed that students expected to be provided with knowledge that promoted critical thinking and solving problems for which there is no routine solution or definite answer, which left place for discussion, persuasion, and arguing, as put forth by Levy and Murnane (2005). The interviewees agreed that the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are very important but expressed their wish to develop skills like communicating, arguing, persuading, etc., as these skills, so they believe, are fundamental in today's society.

7. Discussion of the main findings

The data collected from the interviews and observation sessions provided significant information regarding students' reactions to the instruction they were provided with in their last two years at university. The interviews allowed the participants to express that the provision of instruction was mainly based on rote learning. Since most of the participants will be taking a teaching career in vocational or technical schools, they expressed their fear and frustration at being unable to transfer what they acquired inside the four walls to the outside world.

The results obtained from the study indicate clearly that teaching cannot be improved unless training sessions on students' engagement, active learning are scheduled. It is true that policymakers have urged teachers to update instruction, but much progress needs to be made to empower them with the skills and facilities required for a 21st century classroom.

The findings of the research revealed that general English teachers cannot be catapulted into an ESP class to teach 21st century students. Besides, policymakers and educational leaders should see to it that novice teachers are trained to implement teaching quality. Moreover, an

important deduction can be made in regard to students' feedback. Many students confessed that assessment was carried out with no regard to their teaching style, taking the form of an essay with no chance of knowing how the essay was graded since no rubric was used for this effect.

8. Limitations and Recommendations

The study needs deeper investigation as the sample size was not large enough to get significant results both during the classroom observation sessions and during the interviews. Besides, all the interviewed students were graduating students in ESP (Master II), which constitutes another limitation of the study. Including students from different levels could have provided better insights and valid results about the study.

9. Conclusion

The study attempted to explain why the acquisition of 21st-century skills is important, and how lecturing via handouts or textbooks has become obsolete and ineffective in modern education. It is undeniable that students can learn a lot through rote teaching, but they are incapable of applying the acquired knowledge in new contexts or using it to solve problems (OECD, 2009).

Unlike traditional education, teaching in the digital age seeks to make students transfer the knowledge acquired in a four-wall setting to the outer real world, full of scenarios/problems many of which are complex and interdisciplinary (involving many fields). This sort of teaching promotes their critical thinking and teaches them to take initiatives after analysis, strengthening in this way students' autonomy. Holding the view that learning these skills makes a big difference in the lives of students and enables them to face the new challenges, be effective citizens, and active participants in the new global economy, teachers are required to support the acquisition of these skills by incorporating engaging strategies in their lesson plans.

Unfortunately, although there is some goodwill on the part of teachers to provide their students with the 21st century skills, many find it difficult to get away with the traditional way of teaching. The basic reasons of teachers' resistance are a lack of expertise in implementing differentiated instruction, engaging activities, independent learning, authentic learning, etc.

Since the mode of teaching cannot be overhauled by teachers alone, educational leaders, policymakers and all agents involved in the educational spheres should support teachers in their mission through various and varied training programmes that would enhance their teaching performance.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A Difference between Traditional Education and Modern Education

Education in the past	Education today
Students learnt about the language.	Students learn how to use the language.
The class was teacher centered.	The class is student centered.
Teaching focused on the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing	Teaching focuses on group work, interpersonal communication, creativity, problem solving, critical thinking, analysing,.....
Syllabus has to be covered.	Goals have to be attained.
The instructor: main agent of instruction.	Students are part of the teaching learning process.
Total absence of technology	Technology is part of instruction.
Students were taught the same thing in the same way	Differentiated instruction is being used to meet individual needs.
Learning was confined within the four walls	Learning is provided inside and outside the class through extracurricular activities.
Assessment was performed for grading students	Assessment is used to evaluate students' proficiency and to align assessment strategies with the specific goals and learning outcomes of the syllabus.

Appendix B Examples of Interdisciplinary Approaches

Approach	Definition	Example
Thematic Unit	A thematic unit is a lesson plan designed around a specific theme. It involves creating a series of integrated lessons for all content areas, reading, writing, math, science, etc. that are supported by the theme being studied.	The effects of plastic on marine life, environment, community
Inquiry circles	In inquiry circles, students work together on a common interest about a topic, share their findings and opinions with peers.	Students can form circles about sea animals being entangled by marine debris, how to solve the problem, design leaflets, beach clean up campaign, statistics, graphs to raise people's awareness.
Project based learning	Project based learning is a teaching method in which students learn by actively engaging in real-world and personally meaningful projects. It aims to build students' creative capacity to work through difficult or ill-structured problems, commonly in small teams.	Students can think of a recipe and share it with peers. This example incorporates several subjects: - Math: Ingredients, fractions (Scale up or down for more or fewer people). - Science: Baking, physical/chemical. - Language arts: Write paragraph. - Social studies: Where ingredients came from, demographics.
STEAM	STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. It is a holistic, interdisciplinary approach that harnesses the natural symbiosis between these disciplines to foster creative problem-solving, collaboration and critical thinking that students will need in the 21st Century workforce.	Designing a web site for an Environmental Association

Appendix C Classroom Observation Checklist

Instructor :-----
Course:-----

Group:-----
Number of students:---

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Preparation	YES	NO	NOT EVIDENT
• Learning objectives were clearly stated			
• Stress free learning environment			
Teacher's knowledge			
• Linked the subject to other/previous lessons			
• Presented authentic, updated materials and at the level of students' abilities			
Methodology			
• Appropriate pacing and to the needs of the students			
• Used good quality resources			
• Used different learning strategies			
• Teaching was stimulating, engaging, challenging...			
• Effective use of Q&A			
• Catered for learners' differences			
Students' reaction to lesson			
• Students were engaged in learning			
• New knowledge offered and explored			
• Students were offered scaffolding strategies			
• Students were given ample time to talk/answer			
Classroom management			
• Effective time management			
• Students were given equal attention			
• T. intervened and monitored students' progress			
• Students were given opportunities to think and reflect on their own learning.			
Assessment			
• Previous knowledge activated			
• On- going assessment evident			
• Oral and written feedback received			
• Assessed actively where students were at with the learning goal in mind and modified when there was felt need.			
Teacher's instructions- students' learning			
• Students were encouraged to take part in the learning process			
• Teaching styles matched learning styles			
• Students seem to be learning			
• Teacher provided positive and constructive feedback			

Appendix D Questions Posed during Interviews

1. How often did the instructor (s) ask yes/no questions? How were they?
2. How would you describe the lecture? Was it based on taking notes?
3. Did you feel engaged in the teaching learnin process?
4. Were you assigned some activities during the period? Were they performed individually or in group work?
5. Do you think the information you obtained in class will be of great use to you outside the class? Justify your answer!
6. How often was technology part and parcel of your instructor's teaching?
7. Have you given a presentation during the academinc year (Master II)? If yes, describing the proceeding of the presentation?.
8. Did the teacher use differentiated instruction during the term?
9. Could you describe the way you were assessed?
10. How would you wish the lesson to be?